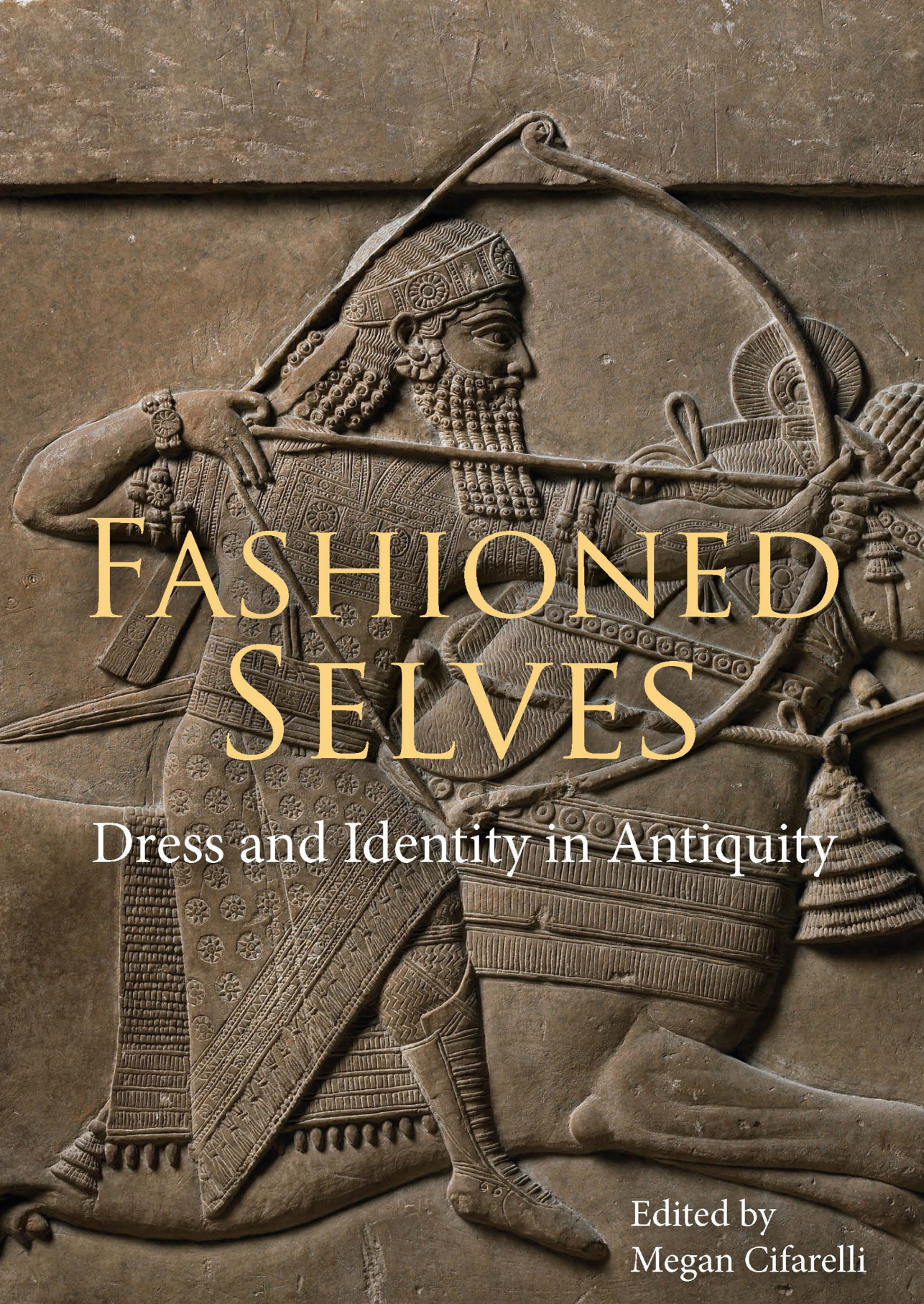


An ancient Egyptian stone relief carving of a deity, likely Osiris, shown from the waist up. The figure has a long, full beard and wears a tall, ornate headdress. He is dressed in a highly detailed, patterned garment with a wide, decorative border. The figure's right arm is raised, holding a long staff or scepter. The background is a plain, weathered stone surface.

FASHIONED SELVES

Dress and Identity in Antiquity

Edited by
Megan Cifarelli

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Front cover: BM 124876 Assurbanipal on horseback, dressed in a rosette-patterned hunting dress with stylus inserted in the waistband. North Palace Room S, Panel 13 (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

Back cover: Tribute procession of the Syrian delegation, with a Persian courtier leading a delegate by the hand on the Eastern stairway of the Apadana, Persepolis (top); Tribute procession of the Assyrian delegation, with delegates leading rams and carrying textiles on the Eastern stairway of the Apadana, Persepolis (bottom) (courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).

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Introduction: Fashioned selves

Megan Cifarelli

This volume gathers papers presented in the *Approaches to Dress and the Body* sessions at the Annual Meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research in 2016 and 2017, as well as in sessions relating to ancient dress at the Annual Meetings of the Archaeological Institute of America in 2018.¹ The case studies in this volume draw upon varied and overlapping corpora of evidence, including archaeological bodies themselves and the physical traces of dress in the form of markings on the skin and associated mortuary goods, as well as evidence for dress in written and visual culture. The materials stem from a range of geographic and chronological contexts – including Late Antique Central Asia, the prehistoric Caucasus, Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, the Levant, Egypt, the Aegean, and the Greco-Roman world. The breadth of this volume is deliberate, intentionally underscoring the cultural specificity and localization of the reciprocal interactions between dress and identity. The chapters emphasize as well that dress does not simply function as a static expression of identity or status – inscribed on the body to be “read” by others – but is a dynamic component in the construction, embodiment, performance, and transformation of identities.²

A brief look at the origins of dress in human history – its relationship to the evolution of human cognition and the development of behavioural modernity – sheds new light on the proverbial statement that “clothes make the man” (attributed to Erasmus of Rotterdam, among others). Direct evidence for the initial development of dress is lost to time and the perishability of materials. Indirect evidence, however, suggests that our distant ancestors were decorating and covering their bodies as early as the early Late Pleistocene (Bar-Yosef Mayer and Bosch 2019). Caches of coloured pigments accompanying sites of human activity in this period, for example, may have been used to mark bodies (Barham 2002; Langley and O’Connor 2019). Three sites claim to have the

“world’s oldest” durable dress elements – perforated shells are attested to in a cave in Israel (Skhul) dated c. 150,000–100,000 years ago, a site in Algeria (Oued Djebbana), and another in Morocco (Grotte des Pigeons), both dating c. 90,000 years ago (for details and bibliography see Gilligan 2010 and Steele *et al.* 2019). The era in which people began to cover their bodies with clothing has been pegged to the evolution of clothing/body lice from head lice, now thought to have occurred between 170,000 and 90,000 years ago in Africa. These early modes of dress emerged in warmer climates, suggesting that they manifest symbolic, rather than survival, behaviours. During this critically important timeframe for human evolution, the innovation of dress practices was part of a “suite of complex behaviours and technologies associated with the transition from archaic to modern *Homo sapiens*” (Toups *et al.* 2011, 29).³ Periods of cooler temperatures during the Late Pleistocene across Europe and Asia spurred technological innovations – the use of stone scrapers and bone needles to craft more tailored clothing – which yielded increasingly complex dress solutions with commensurate cultural potential (Gilligan 2010).

There is a temptation to trivialize the significance of the emergence and development of dress – to treat it as superficial “ornamentation” or “adornment”, on the one hand, or on the other hand simply as the unintended consequence of the need for thermal insulation. But the emergence of dress and the elaboration of the body demonstrate the same advanced cognitive capacities required for the birth of language in human beings. Evidence for this kind of cognition lies, for example, in the enduring and widespread use of pigmented, perforated shell ornaments in Europe and Asia during the Upper Palaeolithic era. Shells were deliberately collected, transported, altered, and coloured over the course of many generations, strongly suggesting that this dress activity was a conscious, transmissible, and *effective* form of symbolic behaviour – a complex and well-understood communication system that signalled social categorization (D’Errico and Vanhaeren 2009, 37). As much as, and in tandem with, language, dress has contributed to the making of humankind itself, and for as long as people have been people dress has played a role in the fashioning of identities and the constitution and communication of personhood.

Millennia later, the constitutive and communicative roles of dress remain deeply embedded in language and culture. The cloak (*adderet*) passed by the prophet Elijah to his servant Elisha (1 Kings 19, 19–21) is so deeply entangled with Elijah’s identity and personhood that even after Elijah ascended to heaven, his authority remained on earth with the cloaked Elisha (Wagstaff 2017, 406). We recall this episode when we use the phrase “pass the mantle” or “take the mantle” to express the transference of memories, responsibilities, and agency from one person to another. Similarly, the English word “investiture”, rooted in the Latin *vestīre* – to clothe or dress, signifies the conferral or ratification of a particular office or position upon a person, a literal transformation from one identity to another.

The academic study of ancient dress began as a quasi-scientific effort during the Enlightenment era in Europe to classify historical costumes from various regions

and chronological horizons (McFerrin 2017). It soon encompassed the analysis of literature, images, and artefacts that attest to dress practices, the production of clothing and objects adorning the body, as well as the social significance and meaning of particular forms of dress (e.g. Baadsgaard 2008; Gaspa *et al.* 2017; Nosch *et al.* 2013; Sheikh *et al.* 2014). While illuminating, some studies have approached clothing, jewellery, etc. as static signifiers to be “read” by others, focusing on their reception and social impact over their active, dynamic role in crafting the identities of their wearers.

Based in part on the critical work of Mary Ellen Roach Higgins and Joanne Eicher (1992), and Joanne Entwistle (2000), the study of dress has broadened beyond costume and technology to include dress writ large: the “assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body” (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992, 1–2). This more comprehensive approach to dress practices, what Allison Thomason in this volume (p. 217) terms “dressology”, acknowledges the experience of dressed bodies and the role of dress in crafting individual and group identity as much as its communicative potential (e.g. Baitzel and Goldstein 2014; Cifarelli and Gawlinski 2017; Harris 2014; Lee 2015; Sørensen 1997).

Many of the chapters in this volume, including those by Swerida and Nugent, Highcock, Heyn and Raja, Helle, Palmer, Kawami, Haworth, N’Shea, and McFerrin, engage deliberately and explicitly with the imbricated natures of both identity *and* dress, demonstrating the ways that combinations of dress features come together in ensembles that shape, perform, and display gender, ethnicity, divinity, communality, occupation, and status simultaneously. While I have divided the chapters in this volume into four sections – one each devoted to funerary, supernatural/sacral, and communal identities, and a final section that explores the intersections between dress and its affective qualities and the identities of the wearers – I note the artificiality of this ontological scheme, for as a collection and individually, these papers show the complexity and intersectionality of the identities constructed and communicated through dress.

In *Funerary selves*, chapters by Swerida and Nugent, Highcock, and Heyn and Raja explore the role of dress, in the form of durable goods and as represented in visual culture, in the crafting and display of layered, post-mortem identities that are gendered, hierarchical, ethnic, communal, and personal, mirroring the social complexity of their contexts. Swerida and Nugent provide a holistic analysis of a single burial in the form of a kurgan in the South Caucasus, while Highcock explores the significance of a particular artefact type – the *tudittu* or toggle-pin – in burials in the Old Assyrian administrative centre at Kültepe-Kaneš. While Syro-Mesopotamian in style, these objects belonging to women were both transferable wealth and expressions of the intercultural character of the entangled communities in which they were found. Examining funerary reliefs of men from Palmyra in what is now Syria, Heyn and Raja demonstrate the ways that relatively simple and uniform male dress in many of these images contributed to a cohesive communal identity.

In *Sacred fashions*, the power of dress to enact dramatic transformations of identity in ritual and sacral contexts is explored by Stein, Colburn, Fox, Helle, and Palmer. Stein's paper examines the evidence for the practice of shamanism in prehistoric through Bronze Age Mesopotamia, particularly the role of ritual masking in the transformation of women into powerful healers and conduits to the divine. She further argues that these beliefs and practices underlie the Mesopotamian practice of ritual dressing as a means of animating cult statues. Looking at the evidence of jewellery in burials from Prepalatial Crete, Colburn proposes a methodology for understanding the significance of the use of colourful materials on Crete through the lens of the Near Eastern and Egyptian textual references to colour. While these materials have previously been linked to prestige, she argues here that they may have played an active role in constructing ritually significant identities for the deceased, as was the case in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In her analysis of positive and negative references to permanent body modifications – primarily tattoos – in biblical texts, Fox contextualizes the practice within the broader Near East. Using parallels from Egypt and Mesopotamia, Fox associates these bodily transformations with the exercise of divine authority in the worship of Yahweh, identifying tattooed individuals as being under his protection, while forbidding the practice to all others. Looking at ancient Near Eastern texts, Helle examines rituals for the worship of the goddess Inana/Ishtar involving particular dress items – weapons and weaving implements, both powerful and enduring signifiers of masculine and feminine gender, respectively. In the context of ritual, Helle argues, these items become unstable signifiers that can transform and even reverse gender in ways that underscore the chaotic power of the goddess. Finally, the chapter by Palmer explores the critical role of dress – including clothing, jewellery, and fragrance – in the radical transformation of an ordinary human man into the high priest of Israel. Like the shaman's mask, the high priest's dress bridges the gap between humanity and the supernatural, his luminous body an access point to the divine and a microcosm of the relationship between Yahweh and his faithful worshippers.

In *Communal selves*, papers by Verduci, Kawami, N'Shea, Haworth, and Hensellek explore the way dress constructs and signals identities that pertain to communal affiliation, leadership, and the exercise of political power. Verduci problematizes the well-trodden association between the feathered headdress and "Philistine ethnic" identity in Bronze Age Egyptian imagery, suggesting that this equation oversimplifies the complex relationship between dress and identity in an era characterized by movements of peoples. The chapter by Kawami delves into the elaborately fringed dress of elite Elamite women, as depicted in a wide range of mediums from the 3rd–1st millennia BCE in southwestern Iran. This high-status dress is related to the performance of an essential, and exclusively female, religious role. Its subsequent adoption by male elites, she suggests, is part of a cultural shift in a time of political uncertainty. N'Shea highlights the manner in which the rosette-spangled royal hunting dress worn by the king on reliefs

from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh, Assyria employed both archaizing and innovative iconography to fashion the king simultaneously as a virile hunter and a divinely sanctioned scholar. Given that dress is so fundamental to humanity, its absence (nudity) or negation (the wearing of anatomical breastplates that imitate idealized nudity) are regarded as forms of dress behaviour in the chapter by Haworth. In light of the vulnerability and eroticization of male flesh in Greek culture, her study of anatomical breastplates in the visual and material record of ancient Greece concludes that this type of armour functioned as an invulnerable second skin with which an individual performs a warrior identity that is masculine, beautiful, heroic, and quintessentially Greek. In Hensellek's paper, a banquet room in the home of a Sogdian merchant in Panjikent, which is populated with painted, elaborately dressed male banqueters on three walls, becomes an immersive theatre in which painted dress provides subtle social distinctions and cues for the performance of elite conviviality in a particular space.

Finally, in *Beyond identity*, papers by Anderson, Thomason, and McFerrin explore the rich, multi-sensory experience of dressed bodies and the role of dress in crafting embodied individual and collective identities. While we experience the communicative nature of the dress of others through sight, sound, and smell, these papers consider the ways in which we encounter and process our own dressed bodies through movement and touch. Tactility is mediated through our skin, with implications for proprioception and extended cognition. In its impact on touch and movement, dress fundamentally mediates relationships with ourselves, with others, and with our environments. Anderson examines the dynamic relationship between a particular class of Early Bronze Age Minoan seals depicting the bodies of lions, and the particular (human) bodies that wore them, arguing that the wearing of sphragistics objects on the body contributed to the identities of a few powerful individuals on Crete. Using an approach inflected with Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, Thomason investigates the sensory experience of dress – in particular through the lens of painful sensations – by delving into the Mesopotamian visual and verbal vocabulary surrounding the senses and the dressed body. With a focus on materials and images from the Achaemenid Empire, McFerrin also considers the role of dress and its sensorial relationship with the body. The individual's experience of dress is envisioned as essential to gender identity, with dress serving as a boundary as well as an outward projection of self, one that puts the dressed individual in a reciprocal sensory relationship with others and their environment.

Taken together, these essays highlight the myriad ways in which dress mediates socio-cultural relationships, including critically important reciprocal relations between self and others, as well as the establishment of embodied personhood (self and self). Whether considering kings or queens; religious practitioners or worshipers; ordinary people or those at the lowest echelons of society; dress is the way human beings use materials to alter, obscure, transform, and embellish the body. The persons that we see and engage with in the world, the identities that we craft and observe, are in every sense *fashioned selves*.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to the contributors to this volume, as well as all of the participants in the related ASOR and AIA sessions, for bringing fresh perspectives to the study of ancient dress. Thanks as well are due to the anonymous peer reviewers who graciously lent their time and expertise, in some cases going far above and beyond what is required.
- 2 This bibliography is enormous and expanding. For a more thorough exploration of theoretical and methodological approaches to dress, and a more comprehensive bibliography, see Cifarelli and Gawlinski 2017.
- 3 The association between the emergence of dress and that of modern *Homo sapiens* does not preclude the possibility that other hominin species, particularly Neanderthals, also developed dress, as Neanderthal sites evince comparable levels of cultural complexity to those of early modern humans (D'Errico and Vanhaeren 2009). It is possible that early beads from Europe and Asia were created by Neanderthals, and highly likely that Neanderthals living in colder climates would have covered at least parts of their bodies (Wales 2012).

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Part One

Funerary selves

Chapter 1

Fashioned identity in the Şərur Valley, Azerbaijan: Kurgan CR8

Jennifer Swerida and Selin Nugent

Abstract

Of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA, 2400–1500 BCE) burials excavated in the Qızqala cemetery of Naxçıvan, Azerbaijan, the remains found in kurgan CR8 provide an exceptional representation of the mortuary identity of the adult male interred within. The Dərələyəz Mountains surrounding the Şərur Valley were a culturally charged landscape on which both the living resident mobile pastoralists and the mortuary monuments to their ancestors coexisted and negotiated their shared community identity. Through detailed examination of the location and contents of kurgan CR8, this paper demonstrates how the mortuary setting and dress of a single elite member of the Qızqala community were fashioned by funerary participants to represent the identity of the interred. Such constructed mortuary identity may be crafted to perpetuate or alter how the deceased is remembered by the surviving community. The fashioning of mortuary identities thus serves as a means of negotiating the larger community identity and social organization. By integrating perspectives drawn from the funerary structure, goods, and human remains of kurgan CR8, this paper balances the fashioned identity of the interred with the current understanding of the broader MBA society in the South Caucasus.¹

Introduction

The recognition and attempted reconstruction of past identities as represented through dress – the collection of materials worn on and modifications made to the body – has long been a subject of archaeological discussion (see Meskell 2001; Joyce 2005; Sørensen 2007). Recent studies have emphasized the dynamic, pluralistic roles that identity plays in social organization and cohesion (see Hutson 2008; MacSweeney 2011; Maldonado and Russell 2016). This is especially true of identity as expressed in mortuary contexts, where deceased individuals are represented not

only by dress materials worn on the body but also by those surrounding, housing, and commemorating the body (*i.e.* clothing, personal adornments, grave goods, and the burial structure/monument). Through mortuary celebration and revisitation, the identities of deceased individuals become part of a community's memory of its own collective identity (Porter 2002; Chapman 2003; Fowler 2013). Yet, the aspects of the deceased's identity that are reflected in mortuary contexts are often selectively chosen by survivors to fashion the ways in which that individual and the individual's relationship to survivors live on in community memory. Since mortuary dress/contexts are often the best sources of preserved information on the identities of past individuals and the communities to which they belonged, the challenge faced by archaeologists is to untangle the social meanings and influences behind each element of fashioned mortuary identity.

Identity can be understood as "the process by which the person seeks to integrate his [or her] diverse experiences, into a coherent image of 'self'" (Epstein 1978). Factors such as age, gender, status, ethnicity, kinship, sexual orientation, and ideology each contribute to a person's identity and bring with them associated behavioural expectations and social roles. Identity, as observed by Lynn Meskell (2001), Scott Hutson (2008), and others (see Meskell and Preucel 2007; Tarlow 2012; Maldonado and Russell 2016), is also pluralistic, situational, and embodied. An individual's expressed identity may change over time and is the product of personal experience as well as physical and social surroundings. These influences contribute to an identity or identities that can be simultaneously personal and shared, ascribed and achieved, feigned and manipulated. Most important for the archaeologist, many of the nuances of an individual or community's identity are communicated through material expression in the form of dress (see Fowler 2010; Cifarelli 2017).

However, the identity communicated through a person's dress in burial may or may not accurately reflect the identity/identities experienced and defined by that person during life. In mortuary spaces – *i.e.* preparative funerary settings (crematorium, stages for washing, dressing, defleshing, *etc.*), spaces for depositing the body (*i.e.* pit, tomb, mausoleum, urn), spaces for visiting the body (*i.e.* cemetery, ossuary, memorial, cenotaph) – archaeologists are faced with the material remnants of the deceased's identity as constructed by funerary participants and integrated into local mortuary traditions. The construction of mortuary identity is a central part of funerary rites that mark an individual's transition from the world of the living to that of the dead. The significance of this process and the connection between funerary ritual and community identity/social cohesion have been discussed at length elsewhere (see Alcock 2002; Porter 2002; Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Variations in funerary assemblage within regional tradition can be cautiously understood as reflecting the "fashioned identity" of the interred individual. The location of the burial, the size and nature of the funerary monument, the attire and personal adornments placed on the body, and the objects interred in the burial are all selected by the living. This mortuary identity may be crafted in such a way as to perpetuate or alter how the

individual is remembered by the surviving community (Porter 2002; Fowler 2010; Nugent 2017; *forthcoming*). Thus, the construction of mortuary identities may serve as a means of effecting the larger community identity and social organization.

The Middle Bronze Age (MBA, 2400–1500 BCE) settlement and cemetery site of Qızqala is located on the northwestern edge of the Şərur Valley of Naxçıvan, Azerbaijan (Fig. 1.1). Survey, excavation, and biogeochemical studies support that the community engaged in mobile and semi-mobile pastoralism (see Ristvet *et al.* 2012; Hammer 2014; Nugent *forthcoming*). The population thus routinely traversed the hills surrounding the valley, where they also marked their landscape with monuments commemorating deceased members of the community. These burial monuments, or *kurgans*, are large, elaborately furnished pit burials with distinctive surface mounding (Fig. 1.2). *Kurgans* in the South Caucasus contain an abundance of grave goods, including ceramic vessels, bronze and lithic weaponry, and assorted fauna, that speak to the role of mobile lifestyles, warfare, and social inequalities that characterize this period. The locations and contents of the Qızqala burials reflect the social hierarchies, territorial claims, lifestyles, and identities of the interred individuals (Nugent 2017; Nugent and Swerida 2017). This paper describes the human remains and material culture found in a well-preserved burial from the Qızqala necropolis – *kurgan* CR8 – and, in so doing,

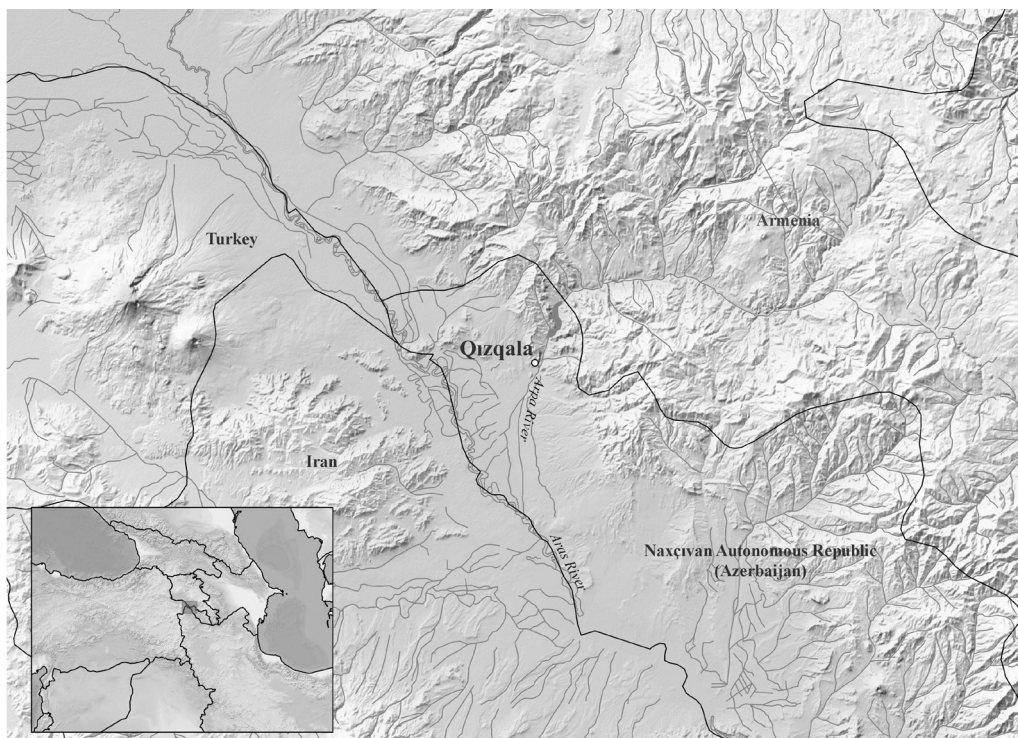


Fig. 1.1 Map of Qızqala (courtesy of the Naxcivan Archaeological Project).

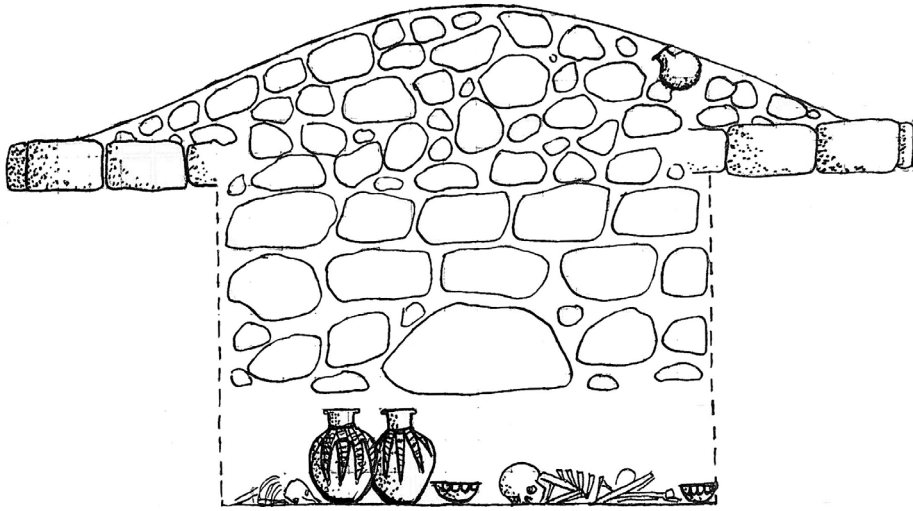


Fig. 1.2 Profile view of a common MBA kurgan in the Aras River Basin.

demonstrates how the mortuary identity of a single elite member of the community was fashioned by funerary participants.

Qızqala Necropolis and Settlement

The end of the 3rd millennium BCE marked a period of major social and economic changes across the South Caucasus. The small-scale sedentary agricultural communities associated with the Kura-Araxes cultures of the Early Bronze Age are replaced by the near disappearance of sustained occupational sites from the archaeological record in the MBA (Kushnareva 1997; Sagona 2014). This phenomenon is understood as representing the emergence of mobile and semi-mobile pastoralism (Kohl 2009).

Qızqala presents significant insight on community dynamics in the MBA as both a cemetery and settlement complex (Plate 1.1). The site is composed of a walled lowland settlement within the valley and a *kurgan* field of over 130 tombs scattered across hilly ridge lines and clustered in highland valleys to the north of the settlement. Systematic survey identified MBA pottery scatters over an area of approximately 8–10 hectares in the hypothesized settlement zone (Hammer 2014). Based on identifiable mounding or stone circle features, the kurgan field occupies an area of roughly 100 hectares.

Within the Qızqala cemetery, *kurgan* CR8 is located amidst a cluster of burials in a highland valley almost directly north of the settlement. This valley system is the most direct access route from the settlement to the pasturelands in the Qızqala hills and is still frequently used by pastoralists today. It is easy to envision this space in the MBA as a culturally active landscape populated by both the living and the dead. Long after the funeral rites had taken place, the size and central location of *kurgan*

CR8 amid this tomb field would have signified to the living members of the Qızqala community, who regularly passed through the valley, that the individual interred within was a significant member of their society.

Kurgan CR8: The mortuary materials

Over two field seasons (2015–2016) of the Naxçıvan Archaeological Project, the authors directed excavation of five clustered valley *kurgans* at Qızqala. These burials followed the standard *kurgan* composition of an earthen mound piled atop a central pit (cist) burial containing a single deceased individual and a funerary assemblage. The *kurgan* sizes and precise shapes vary, as does the presence/absence of a defining *cromlech*, or stone circle marking the burial extent. This particular *kurgan* group stands out among the many burials in the valley because of their proximity to each other and the interlocking *cromlechs* of *kurgans* CR7, CR8, and CR12 (Fig. 1.3).

Measuring 7.3 m, CR8 is the largest of the clustered tombs and was the first to be constructed. The *kurgan* is composed of a partial *cromlech* and a central mound of dirt and three layers of large stones. The mouth of the burial pit (c. 5.3 m) was marked by a large cap stone. The space within the unlined burial pit was furnished with mortuary goods and contained the remains of a single human (Figs 1.4, 1.5).

The interred individual was an adult male, 40–50 years old at the time of death, and was tightly flexed and placed at the western end of the oblong burial pit. Notably, this

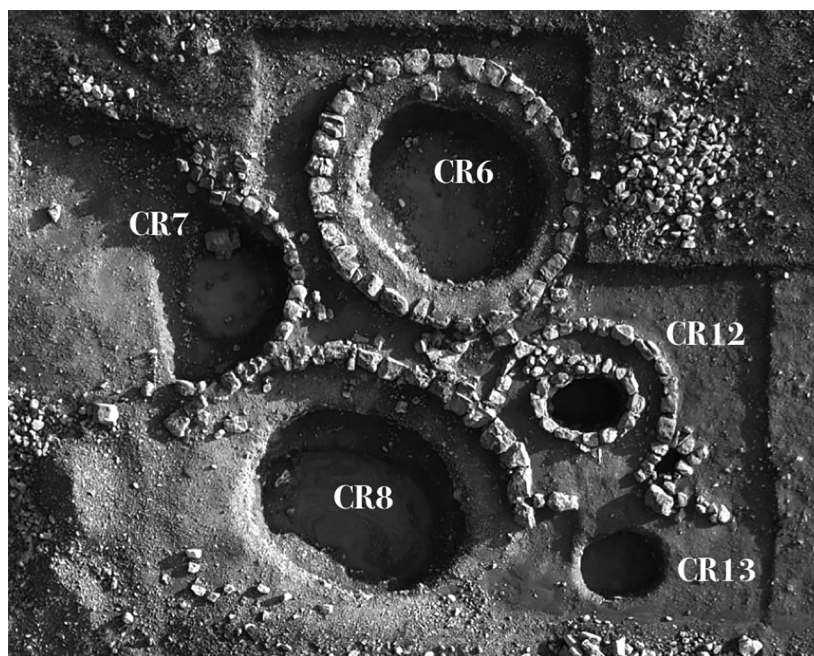


Fig. 1.3 Overhead view of Qızqala lowland kurgan cluster.

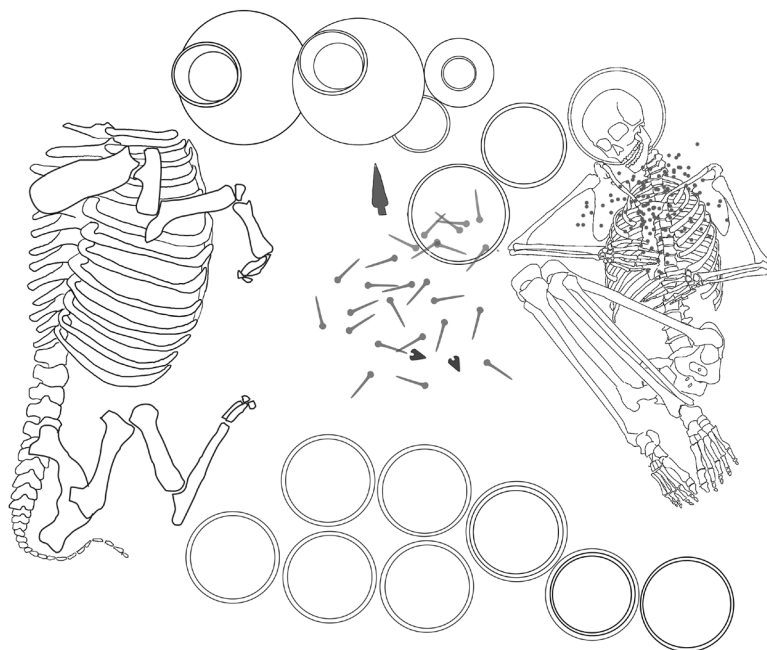


Fig. 1.4 Plan of kurgan CR8.

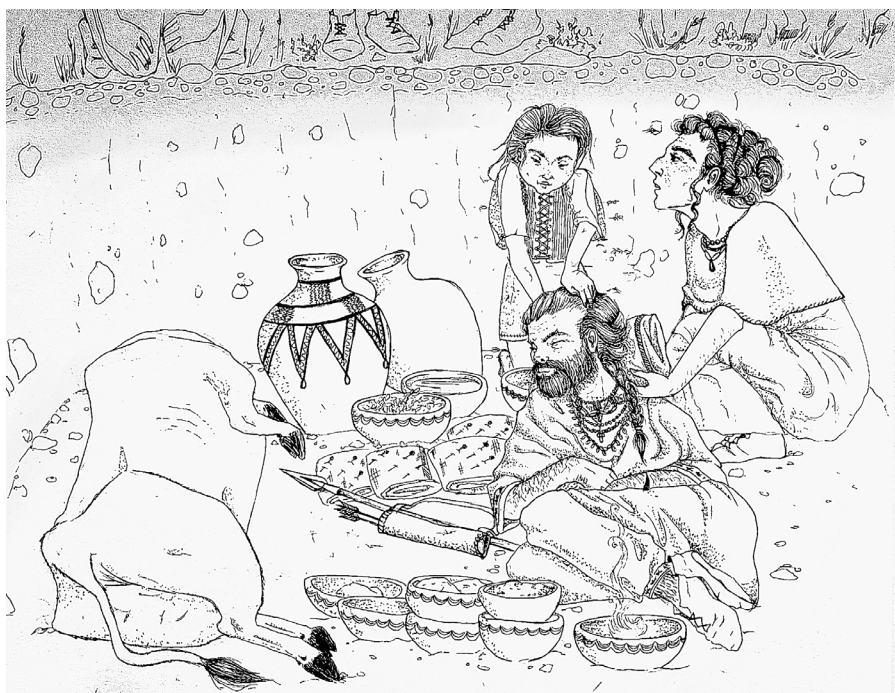


Fig. 1.5 Reconstruction of kurgan CR8 funerary preparations.

individual exhibits trauma on the right forearm that suggests interpersonal violence at the time of death. The distal right ulna has two unhealed mediolateral lacerations (2–3 mm deep, 8–10 mm wide), which are typical of defensive injuries obtained while protecting the face from a blow. The placement of the cranium was initially perceived as unusual in that it was not articulated with the post-cranial remains. The cranium was discovered within a large bowl that was positioned in alignment with the rest of the skeleton. It is probable that, at the time of interment, the bowl was filled with a perishable commodity (*e.g.* textiles or food offerings) and was used to prop up the deceased's head. Over time, as materials in the burial decomposed, the skull disarticulated from the body and descended into the bowl. An alternative interpretation is that the individual's head was disarticulated from the body prior to interment and was placed in the bowl as part of the funerary rites. However, there are no skeletal indications of disarticulation. Oxygen and strontium isotopic analysis of bone and teeth yielded values within local ranges, suggesting a lifetime spent within the vicinity of the Şərur Valley (Nugent 2017; *forthcoming*) (Fig. 1.6).

The bowl containing the cranium was one of a collection of 14 red ware bowls found lining the northern and southern edges of the burial pit (Fig. 1.7). Such bowls, decorated on the shoulder with painted black designs of three concentric hanging loops, are typical of MBA mortuary assemblages in the South Caucasus and likely played a role in funerary rites (see Robinson 1977, fig. 5; Kushnareva 1997, figs 41–44; Smith *et al.* 2009, figs 16–17). Most examples in the Qızqala collection appear to have been quickly produced: discolourations in the vessel fabric bespeak poor firing conditions and the painted decorations lack the precision found on contemporary ceramics. It may be that these vessels were produced specifically for use in funerary activities.

The CR8 ceramic assemblage also includes a painted red ware jar that was found resting atop the central stone mound (Fig. 1.8), as well three other red ware jars found

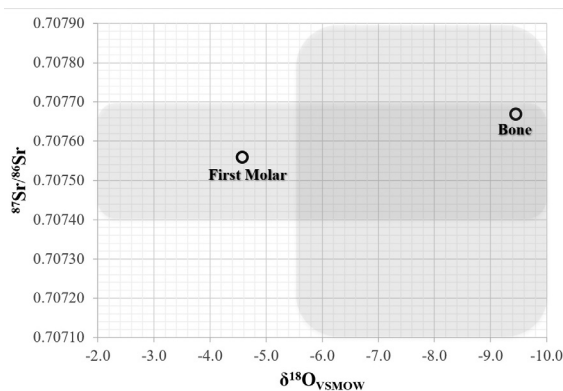


Fig. 1.6 CR8 strontium and oxygen isotopic values at birth (first molar) and in the last decade of life (bone). Local isotopic baseline ranges for Şərur Valley shaded in grey.

within the burial pit (all painted but one). The three decorated jars feature similar geometric designs painted on the vessel rims, necks, and shoulders: thick black bands running vertically down the vessel neck, horizontally around the upper shoulder, and hanging triangular shapes that come to a point at the vessel's widest extent. Comparable vessel forms and decorative schemes are known from kurgan burial contexts throughout Azerbaijan and Armenia and are common in



Fig. 1.7 CR8 Ceramic assemblage.

the Naxçıvan region (see Rubinson 1977, fig. 5; Kushnareva 1997, figs 40, 41, and 44; Belli and Bahsaliyev 2001).

The CR8 individual wore a beaded garment or collection of necklaces draped across the chest, of which only the beads now survive. This collection consists of over 130 beads made from amber (1), bone (2), carnelian (3), shell (54), and shaped faience (71) (Plate 1.2). The spherical amber bead and three carnelian beads indicate interactions with long-distance trade. Faience, the largest subset of the CR8 bead collection, includes



Fig. 1.8 Red ware jar found on CR8 mound.

numerous colours (*e.g.* white, green, blue, and red) and shapes. The most common forms are simple (*e.g.* circular, spherical, and cylindrical) and elaborated with protuberances, known as “warts”, or ridges in the faience paste that give the beads a segmented appearance. Beads of these types were mass produced in the MBA and distributed throughout the Caucasus (see Shortland *et al.* 2007). The Qızqala collection also includes some unusually shaped faience beads that appear to have been intended to draw attention (Plate 1.3). The most noteworthy of these is a large (2.2 cm long, 1.2 cm maximum diameter), green

and blue (dulled to a greenish-grey) bead with a distinctly phallic shape (see Plate 1.3, far left). The combined size, colour, and eye-catching shape of this bead suggest that it served as a centrepiece of the personal decorations of the interred.

A collection of 16 large, copper/bronze pins was found clustered just east of the skeleton (Fig. 1.9). The pins are all of the same size and style: 8.5 cm long, unpierced shafts, and bulbous round heads decorated with five small, protruding “warts”. Pins of comparable size have been found in MBA *kurgans* elsewhere in the South Caucasus (see Robinson 1976, pl. 15; Kushnareva 1997, fig. 39), however, no other collection yet compares to CR8 in terms of the number of examples belonging to a single burial. The clustered, yet haphazard arrangement of the pins in *kurgan* CR8 suggests that they may have originally been embedded in textiles, clothing, or other material that has not survived, such as a wooden or leather object. The warted design on the pin heads can be compared to many of the faience beads found on the CR8 skeleton and to ornamental pins made of precious materials found in elite *kurgans* in the Trialeti cemetery (Robinson 1976, pl. 49; 1977, fig. 4; Kushnareva 1997, fig. 47). This stylistic similarity supports interpreting the CR8 pin collection as decorative in nature, regardless of the materials in which they were originally embedded.

The evidence for a physically demanding lifestyle visible in the CR8 skeletal remains is reinforced by the presence of several weapons in the burial pit. Two extremely fine, pressure flaked obsidian arrowheads were located just east of the skeleton (Fig. 1.10). These arrowheads are technologically similar to examples from other MBA *kurgans* excavated in the Qızqala necropolis, as well as elsewhere in the South Caucasus (Robinson 1976, pl. 51; Kushnareva 1997, figs 37, 43, and 60; Smith 2015, fig. 32b). The CR8 burial pit also contained a long copper/bronze spearhead with a wrapped shaft (Fig. 1.11). Despite the spearhead’s poor preservation, it can be stylistically and technologically compared to spearheads from elite MBA tombs elsewhere in the region (Robinson 1977, fig. 2; Kushnareva 1997, fig. 39; Smith *et al.* 2009). The presence of such weaponry in the burial pit, albeit a more modest hoard than those found in the warrior *kurgans* of the northern South Caucasus, suggests that the individual interred in *kurgan*

CR8 had a militaristic persona that is in keeping with the evidence of violent trauma on the skeleton.

The eastern end of the CR8 burial pit was filled with the remains of an adult bovid. The skeleton was partially articulated and the skull was notably absent (Lau and Knudson 2018). The inclusion of such a valuable animal in the burial represents a substantial pastoral resource that was removed from circulation in connection with the CR8 funerary rites.



Fig. 1.9 Examples of CR8 copper/bronze pins; detail of decorated pinhead in upper left.

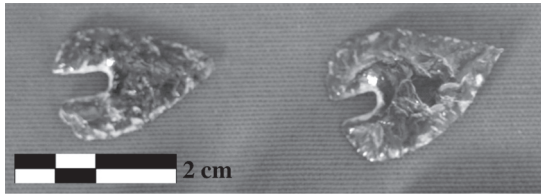


Fig. 1.10 Obsidian arrowheads from kurgan CR8.

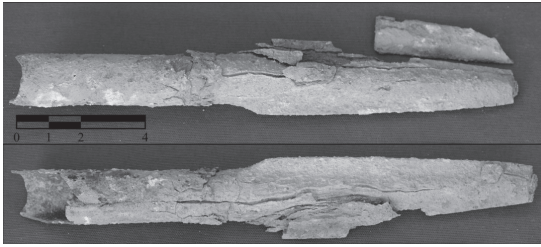


Fig. 1.11 Copper/bronze spearhead from kurgan CR8.

The smaller *kurgans* surrounding CR8 contained more limited but stylistically similar assemblages of funerary artefacts. These burial goods demonstrate that the individuals interred in CR6, CR7, CR12, and CR13 all had access to high status materials such as obsidian, copper/bronze, and carnelian. However, the most significant indicator of their social status and mortuary identities, as remembered by the surviving residents of Qızqala, was likely the close proximity of their burials to the larger CR8. As more and more *kurgans* were installed in the space around CR8, the monument's visual and social significance as the central

burial continued to increase and the mortuary identity of the individual within loomed ever larger in the collective memory of the Qızqala community.

Discussion

On a regional scale, the practice of monumental and ostentatious elite burial exemplifies the tribal-based, mobile pastoralism of MBA South Caucasus communities. Variations in funerary assemblages and burial architecture elaboration indicate an increase in social inequality, with emphasis on males engaged in militaristic activities (Smith 2015). Furthermore, the placement of highly visible burial features in highland pasturelands suggests a landscape both of subsistence and ritual (Nugent and Swerida 2017). These top-down perspectives on communities venerating their dead speak to important political and economic trends on a regional scale. In this sense, CR8 is not an exceptional or unusual *kurgan* from a regional perspective and close comparisons of architecture and funerary assemblages can be made to other contemporary cemetery sites across the South Caucasus. Parallel MBA funerary features are documented at Haftavan Tepe in Iran (Burney 1975), Metsamor (Khanzadian *et al.* 1973), Karmir Berd (Kushnareva 1960), Lori Berd (Devedjian 2006), and Lchashen (Kushanreva 1985) in Armenia, as well as with the larger-scale Trialeti funerary traditions in Georgia (Kuftin 1941). However, recent scholarship in the region increasingly promotes balancing seemingly homogeneous regional patterns with perspectives on local variation in funerary ritual (see Marshall 2012; Nugent 2017). The intersection of lived experience and identity fashioned through burial dress, evident in CR8, highlights the necessity to complement this perspective with a bottom-up approach that elaborates on the identities and social dynamics underpinning regional processes.

CR8 Mortuary identity

Several threads indicate the elite quality of CR8. The positioning of the large *kurgan* on a main traffic route between the settlement and the pastures ensured the visual prominence of the funerary monument in the daily lives of the Qızqala community. The sustained social significance of this monument is indicated by the pains taken to interlock the *cromlechs* of the smaller adjacent *kurgans* with that of CR8. This structural connection may reflect familial relationships and/or the development of CR8 as a community ancestor.

Objects made of carnelian, copper/bronze, amber, obsidian, and an adult bovid indicate material wealth, as do perishables (such as cloth, food, and drink) implied by the copper/bronze pins and numerous vessels interred with the deceased. Beyond material value, the character of the burial goods colours the individual's mortuary identity with the shades of a personality. The collection of weapons resting next to the skeleton highlight a militaristic aspect of identity, while the cattle connects to the pastoral lifestyle practiced by Qızqala's MBA residents. At a nuanced level, stylistic details in the pins, beads, and presumed textiles provide further indications of the individual's social status, affiliations, and personal preferences.

This mortuary persona situates the person commemorated in and by CR8 neatly within the MBA cultural and mortuary traditions of the South Caucasus. Details included in the fashioning of the CR8 mortuary dress doubtless drew on elements of the interred's perceived individual identity as well as on the shared community identity, which such a celebrated burial would come to represent. Each element of CR8 – its location, structure, assemblage of grave goods, and skeletal remains – can be considered through the interrelated lenses of individual and community meaning. Parsing such entangled influences in the fashioning of mortuary identity is an interpretive balancing act, yet one with the potential to shed light onto the social processes that shaped the region's MBA society.

Fashioning identity in and of Kurgan CR8

The word monument derives from the Latin, *monēre*, or “to remind”. The prominent mounding of *kurgans* that persists millennia after their construction served as reminders for the communities that built and revisited them, as well as the subsequent generations that encountered them. The vessel on the surface of CR8, the burial's visual prominence, and the subsequent addition of smaller burials in the space around CR8 point to a significance in the community beyond the individual identity and lifetime. Rather than an isolated event, the funerary processes surrounding *kurgan* burial were constantly evolving. The period surrounding the inhumation event is most proximate to the living embodiment of individual identity, establishing the role of the deceased in the eyes of the mourners and community. Over generations, *kurgans* serve as points of contact for the living who repeatedly returned to define and reevaluate the memory of the deceased while participating in an ongoing process of social relations with one another (Barrett 2000). With each new visitation, the references between

individual identity and monument grow detached and the individual represented by the monument transforms to embody new roles in shared social history (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). The use of *kurgans* as reminders of ancestral territorial boundaries highlights the transformative potential of social memory as an ideological mechanism through which authorities legitimize power and also as a mechanism of social cohesion and community identity (Alcock 2002).

The physical structure and contents of CR8 – as extensions of burial dress – communicate the social status and fashioned mortuary identity the interred. The individual's wealth and community importance are reflected in the scale of the monument, the quantity of funerary goods, and the value of funerary materials. The ability to command labour for and participants in the funerary process, as well as valuable economic materials, balances individually embodied power and community compliance. The time- and labour-intensive processes involved with funerary ritual of this scale are enacted through the collaboration of people who render and perpetuate the power of the deceased as they enact their own shared community identity.

A complex influence in fashioned identity is found in the physical body. The human skeleton is inscribed by lived experiences through the cumulative impacts of personal actions and those imposed on the body by external forces and actors. The skeleton found in CR8 speaks to how they expressed identity through behaviour in life and how that identity was perceived by others, most prominently through experience with violence. While CR8 was provided with weaponry, the quantity is smaller than that of other assemblages found at Qızqala, and pales in comparison to the abundance of weaponry found in other prominent MBA “warrior” burials in the northern regions of the South Caucasus (see Chubuinishvili 1955). However, lived experience evident in the skeleton situates the role of weaponry in mortuary identity and elevates its purpose beyond a community tradition to objects that had relevance in life.

Similarly, isotopic evidence for CR8's local origins and locality throughout life intersects with the position of the *kurgan* monument on the landscape. The lowland *kurgan* field, of which CR8 is a central figure, is the most densely constructed portion of the necropolis and closest to the Qızqala settlement. Individuals buried in this area were collectively of local origins and were less mobile than those interred in the highlands (Nugent and Swerida 2017; Nugent *forthcoming*). The individual in CR8 shares a life history of movement with the surrounding group and a prominent position within the cemetery accentuates inclusion in this shared community identity.

The decoration and provisioning of the body during funeral rites is a meaning-laden process, through which the deceased transitions from the world of the living to that of the dead and is modelled as simultaneously a representative of the once-living individual and an idealized member of the community (Porter 2002; Fowler 2013). The presence of standard mortuary objects found in MBA burials throughout the South Caucasus, such as the quintessential red ware bowls, were presumably used in funeral rites and signalled this transition to funerary participants. Other common

elements, such as the CR8 red ware jars, weapons, and cattle, connect the interred to social roles (e.g. elite access to material wealth, militarism, and localized pastoralism) valued by the community.

Decoration of the body is often the most personal element of mortuary dress. Personal adornments, such as the beads worn by the person interred in CR8, are closely tied to embodied individual identity (Kuhn and Stiner 2007; Tarlow 2012). Choices of personal ornaments are typically linked to experienced qualities of identity such as age, status, power, social affiliation, gender, and/or sexual orientation. The presence in CR8 of beads made of carnelian and amber connect the deceased to a network of long-distance mobility and trade, while the various faience beads fit within the decorative tradition of the MBA South Caucasus (Shortland *et al.* 2007). The regional aesthetic of the faience beads is reinforced by the stylistically similar pins. While the nuanced meanings once communicated by these ornaments cannot yet be reconstructed, through them it is possible to glimpse an individual identity linked to wealth, worldliness, and a deep connection to the region.

As the apparent centrepiece of the worn personal adornments in *kurgan* CR8, the greatest indicator of the individual identity of the interred is the large, phallic faience bead. The bead's size, once-bright colouration, and eye-catching form are unusual. Such a central and distinctive decoration would have been carefully chosen by funerary participants as representative of the individual it adorned. The bead's phallic shape conjures to mind themes of maleness, sexuality, and virility, while its faience medium is characteristic of the region and emphasized the wearer's local origins. In later periods, such personal phallic ornaments also take on apotropaic qualities (Clarke 2014). Although the precise meaning and function of the CR8 decorative phallus remain unknown, its presence on the body brings its wearer's perceived individual identity into sharper focus.

Closing thoughts

The challenges of untangling the relationship between perceived individual and desired community identity in mortuary dress are rewarded with glimpses of the social values and lived experiences of the interred and the social ideals of the broader community. Complementary analyses of burial location, structure, grave goods, and human skeletal remains shed light onto the life and death of interred persons and the social forces at work in the fashioning of mortuary identity.

The MBA abandonment of agricultural settlement practices in favour of mobile pastoralism marks a period of social and political transformation across the South Caucasus. Mobile lifeways leave few material traces to develop perspectives on past social lives and community dynamics, as is the case with the presently limited understanding of the MBA in this region. A bottom-up approach to the prominent and abundant mortuary spaces of this period expands opportunities to access lived experience and how communities conceived their shared identity. These small-scale

representations of past actions and identities cumulatively address broader gaps left by the absence of domestic contexts.

Qızqala is particularly valuable as such a case study because of the interplay between its settlement, pastoral, and funerary settings. As a key point on this charged cultural landscape, CR8 and *kurgans* like it shed light onto social transformations at Qızqala, as negotiations between the living and the dead. In the case of *kurgan* CR8, the burial dress of one individual illustrates the celebration of the elite warrior in life and death as well as a dedication to the locality and pastoral roots of the Şərur Valley. Future study of the Qızqala necropolis using a bottom-up approach will expand individual perspectives, bring greater clarity to the community that inhabited the settlement, and aid in reconstructing the processes that gave shape to social dynamics of the MBA South Caucasus.

Note

- 1 This research was first presented as a conference paper, “A Case of Constructed Identity in the Şərur Valley, Azerbaijan: Kurgan CR8”, at the December 2017 meeting of the American Research Institute of the South Caucasus Colloquium in New York, NY. This project was funded by the National Science Foundation Dissertation Research Grant (#1545697), National Science Foundation Senior Research Grant (#1430404, PIs: Lauren Ristvet, Hilary Gopnik, and Emily Hammer), the Wenner-Gren Foundation Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, and the American Schools for Oriental Research Heritage Fellowship.

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Chapter 2

To toggle back and forth: clothing pins and portable identities in the Old Assyrian Period

Nancy Highcock

Abstract

Nearly seventy years of scientific excavations at Kanesh-Kültepe (Turkey) have yielded a remarkable assemblage of material, including an extensive cuneiform record, reflecting the daily lives of the Anatolians, Assyrians, and others who inhabited this cosmopolitan Middle Bronze Age (MBA) city. Though the majority of material culture found at the site is local in character and production, toggle-pins have a long history across the ancient Near East and many of those found at Kanesh-Kültepe appear to be Syro-Mesopotamian in style. The category of ethnicity, or identity more broadly, is of course problematic to define with material culture, especially for periods and sites in which multiple groups of people are exchanging materials and ideas through activities like trade. Tudittu pins from households and burials at Kanesh-Kültepe do, however, demonstrate that the Assyrians did indeed consume a distinctively Mesopotamian form of material culture whilst abroad. These clothing pins did not necessarily signal a specific Assyrian identity, but their portability and relationship to the body can be associated with the types of material culture one may find in a mercantile context. Furthermore, these pins, charged with multiple meanings, could be used to build and mediate relationships between Assyrians and Anatolians within their intercultural communities.¹

Introduction

This site of Kültepe-Kaneš, located 20 kilometres northeast of the modern city of Kayseri, Turkey, was the administrative heart of the Old Assyrian trade network from the 20th to 18th centuries BCE. At its peak, this network included nearly forty nodes of Assyrian activity and administration in the lower towns of both larger Anatolian settlements (*kārum*) and smaller outposts (*wabartum*) (Barjamovic 2011, 411). These terms designated Assyrian institutions, which organized how the foreign Assyrian

traders, based in the northern Mesopotamian city of Aššur, and members of the local populations forged business partnerships, political alliances, and social relationships. The archives of the Assyrian merchants and their Anatolian contemporaries from the lower town of Kültepe-Kaneš has provided the bulk of historical evidence for both the Assyrian and Anatolian societies of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) and have generated over fifty years of scholarship on the “Old Assyrian Period”.² The trading network, both between Aššur and Anatolia, as well as within Anatolia itself, was complex and changed over time due to various internal and external factors, (Barjamovic, Hertel, and Larsen 2012), but the general pattern was of Old Assyrian merchants bringing tin and textiles into Anatolia and returning to their mother city with silver and gold (Fig. 2.1). Some of the Assyrian merchants, particularly in later generations, maintained households and even families in both Aššur and Anatolia, creating a truly “middle ground” society in which Assyrians and Anatolians forged new identities based on exchange and cooperation at all levels of society (Lumsden 2008; Heffron 2017). Mögen Trolle Larsen and Agnete Lassen have recently tested this theory, demonstrating that mercantile cooperation and intermarriage led to hybrid modes of expression in seal use and iconography (2014).

One characteristic of this Assyrian-Anatolian society was the adoption of Anatolian house styles and ceramic material culture by Assyrians, and indeed early studies of the archaeological remains from Kültepe-Kaneš have argued that without the household archives, *i.e.* tablets and seal impressions, the Assyrians would have remained invisible in the cultural fabric of MBA central Anatolia (N. Özgüç 1966; T. Özgüç 1986, 10; 2003, 3). This statement implies that Assyrians abandoned material expressions of their



Fig. 2.1 Map of Old Assyrian long-distance trade network (Barjamovic 2011, Insert Map 7).

own cultural milieu completely, and thus it is not represented in the archaeological record, obscuring the processes of maintaining and negotiating an Assyrian civic or ethnic identity which occurred alongside processes of hybridization. The situation at Kaneš and presumably other cities which hosted Assyrians is far more complicated than a cursory glance at the material record would have one believe. To assume that because the majority of material culture (namely architectural styles and ceramics) is Anatolian, the Assyrians did not maintain community boundaries, is to use the archaeological record to erase the diverse array of identities present in these cities. Of course, the texts and their associated cylinder seal impressions were the first evidence to signal the Assyrian presence in MBA Anatolia and it is true that Assyrians did adopt “vital elements” of local material culture. Portable objects besides seals, however, such as weapons, weights, jewellery, and clothing pins, also demonstrate that goods produced and consumed in Syro-Mesopotamia, were in fact, present at Kültepe-Kaneš (Özgüç 1959, 110; 1986, 39; 2003, 224; Veenhof 2008, 57; Yıldırım 2010; Michel 2014, 76; Kulakoğlu 2017). This present contribution will further explore one of these categories, clothing fasteners usually referred to as “toggle-pins” in the literature, to demonstrate how a combined analysis of textual and archaeological evidence can both broaden and complicate our understanding of cultural interaction and shed light on the role that portable personal adornments played in the highly mobile world of the Old Assyrian merchants.

Early and Middle Bronze Age toggle-pins

Clothing fasteners, or “toggle-pins”, from the Near East display a broad range of sizes, styles, and material components (Klein 1983; 1992, 235–236 and 291–293; Iamoni 2012). The overarching element that designates them as clothing fasteners and not as another type of dress or hair pin is the round perforation toward the top, or at the centre, of the pin’s shaft. The area from the hole to the sharp point was usually undecorated as it was obscured by the cloth. A string was passed through the hole and wrapped around the exposed parts of the pin and the cloth in order to secure the garment (Baker 2012: 32) (Fig. 2.2). The earliest example of such a pin comes from 4th-millennium BCE Susa and they are widespread from the Levant to Iran during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE until they are generally replaced by the fibula-type of clothing pin (Klein 1992, 291–292; Baker 2012, 32). In Harald Klein’s catalogue of all Bronze Age pins from Mesopotamia and Syria (including some sites from what are today Lebanon, Turkey, and Iran), half of the metal pins, 1657 in number, are pierced (Klein 1992, 291, 337–388). Their function as clothing fasteners is particularly relevant in this regard, as they are often found in burials and thus better preserved than other types of everyday metal objects. For example, in the Bronze Age tomb contexts at Ashkelon, 43 percent of toggle-pins were found directly associated with the human remains and the remaining 57 percent were found in secondary sweeps of the tombs (Baker 2012, 86).

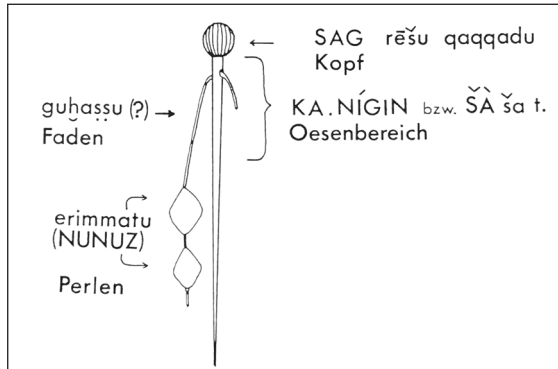


Fig. 2.2 Diagram with Akkadian terminology of a toggle-pin (*tudittum*) (Klein 1992: Tafel 1).

Toggle-pins themselves are not only common in the archaeological record, but also appear in the iconographic record of the late 3rd millennium. The shell inlays from the Dagan Temple at Mari provide several examples of their function as garment fasteners (Fig. 2.3). There are examples of the use of one toggle-pin to secure the clothing (Fig. 2.3a) and the use of two pins crossing over the outer garment (Fig. 2.3b). The majority of these inlays depict women and all but one of the figures displays

a toggle-pin used to secure a string of beads and/or cylinder seal. Indeed, a cylinder seal still attached to a toggle-pin was found in the Early Dynastic “Royal Cemetery” at Ur (U. 9151) among other toggle-pins found in these burials. A pair of gold toggle-pins from Susa dating to the early 2nd millennium BCE are also perhaps paralleled in a contemporary terracotta statuette (Amiet 1966, 326) (Fig. 2.4).

Textual sources from Syro-Mesopotamia also mention toggle-pins and indicate that they were important components of the royal, and even divine, female adornment. Indeed, in the Descent of Ishtar two toggle-pins, designated as *tudittu*

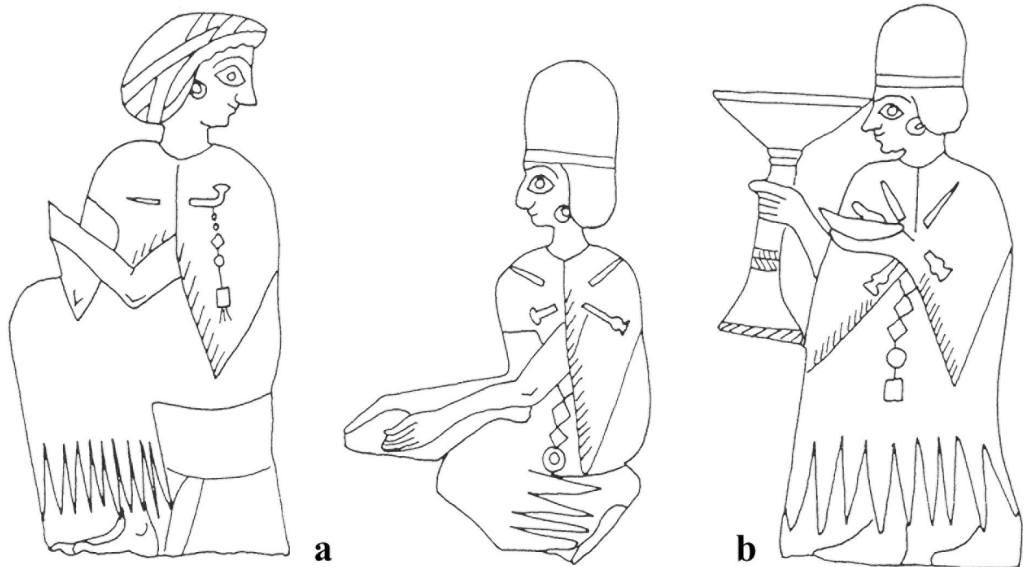


Fig. 2.3 Drawings of inlays from 3rd-millennium Mari (Klein 1992, Tafel 193, no. 2-4).

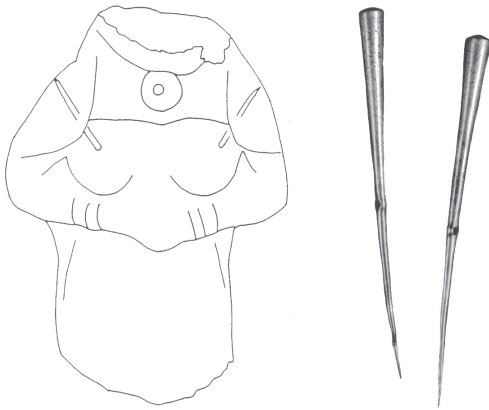


Fig. 2.4 Drawing of Terracotta Statuette of a Woman and Toggle-Pins from 2nd-millennium Susa (Klein 1992, Tafel 195, no. 1; Amiet 1966, 327, no. 146).

in Akkadian (Klein 1983) are part of the goddess's protective and powerful regalia she is forced to jettison when descending into the underworld (CAD "dudittu"; Marcus 1994, 6–7). They were often gifted to women during crucial and transformative life events such as marriage, cultic consecration, and death, and thus are tied to the proper performance of a particularly female identity and social status. At late 3rd-millennium Ebla, for example, Alfonso Archi has demonstrated that the funerary assemblage for royal women was often very similar to the gifts presented at marriage, but entirely new (Archi 2002, 179). The inventory of

the marriage gift for the princess Iti-mut, daughter of the king Irkab-damu, includes two toggle-pins, rendered *bu-di*, with heads plated in gold (Archi 2002, 162). In another instance, the list of precious goods assembled for the funeral of Dusigu, mother of the king, includes two silver toggle-pins with gold-plated heads (TM.75.6.1962; Archi 2002, 178). Here, it is very interesting to note that of all the materials listed, it is only the toggle-pins that the queen mother *herself* dedicated to her own funerary assemblage (Archi 2002, 178) indicating that toggle-pins were highly prized objects imbued with a sense of individual ownership and closely tied to personal identity. That in some cases these pins also functioned to secure one's cylinder seal to the body further concretizes the relationship between individual woman and toggle-pin(s).

Pins from Kültepe-Kaneš

This sense of personal ownership and expression of female identity could also hold true for the toggle-pins recovered from Kültepe-Kaneš and described in the texts, where the majority were found in intramural burials dating to both the earlier period (Level II, c. 1950–1835 BCE) and later period (Level 1b, c. 1830–1700 BCE) of Assyrian presence in the lower town of the city. The toggle-pins themselves display diversity in decoration and material, but are just one type of the c. 70 published pins found at the site, as "Anatolian" style pins lacking the central piercing have also been found in high numbers (Özgüç 1950; 1953; 1955; 1959; 1986, 31–34; 2003; Kulakoğlu and Kangal 2010, 306–311). In his excavation reports, Tahsin Özgüç has distinguished between these "local" types and "foreign" imports, which he designated as "Syrian", postulating that they must have travelled up with the Old Assyrian merchants as there are no moulds for such pins found in the workshops at Kültepe-Kaneš (Özgüç 1959, 110; 1986,



Fig. 2.5 Pins from Kültepe-Kaneš (Kulakoğlu and Kangal 2010, 309, nos. 345–348)

32; 2003, 224). The local pin types tend to have oval-shaped, fluted – sometimes referred to as melon-shaped, or conical heads with plain or heavily ribbed shafts (Fig. 2.5). Zoomorphic heads are also attested. In a study of pin types across western and central Anatolia, Magda Pieniżek and Ekin Kozal have noted that the composite-type dress pin, comprising a metal shaft and bead-like head made from glass, faience, metal, or semi-precious stones were particularly prominent during the MBA, though they are also known from the Early Bronze Age (EBA) levels at Alacahöyük and sites across Syria and Mesopotamia (2014, 196–199). Examples from the MBA Level IVd at Bogazkoy and Level II at Alishar Hüyük display fluted or melon-head types, indicating that the top of the pin, which would have been visible, must have appeared like a rosette or star shape

(Schmidt 1932; Boehmer 1972, Cat nos. 446–447; Pieniżek and Kozal 2014, 196).

Those that Özgüç deemed foreign “imports” can also display heads that are round or fluted, conical, melon-shaped, or shaped like a flattened mushroom (Özgüç 2003, 224) and also possess both ribbed or plain shafts. The defining “foreign” features of these pins are their larger size, between 8 and 18 cm in length, their thickness, and most importantly, the pierced hole located toward the middle or upper middle of the shaft for securing the pin to a garment with metal ring and string (Fig. 2.6). Since the period of Özgüç’s initial argument that these toggle-pins must have travelled up with the Assyrian merchants, other studies have shown that toggle-pins of various types do occur, though infrequently, during the EBA in central Anatolia (Schmidt 1932, 60) at sites further west than previously expected: for example, at Kilise Tepe (Collon and Symington 2007, 518; Iamoni 2012, 359) and Mersin (Klein 1992, 291) in Cilicia. These outliers aside, there is little evidence for the use of toggle-pins across EBA Anatolia, and Marco Iamoni has shown that during the MBA there is no evidence for the “melon-headed” toggle-pin beyond the Euphrates except for at Kültepe-Kaneš (Iamoni 2012, 259–360). This type is fairly common in the burials at Kültepe-Kaneš, and another type with ribbed shaft and simple head has been found with the ring intact (Özgüç 1955, 69) (Fig. 2.6a, 2.6c). It is important to note that toggle-pins are also incredibly common in burials from MBA Aššur as well and that the five types identified from Aššur, including “melon-headed”, all have parallels at Kültepe-Kaneš (Hockmann 2010, 73) (Fig. 2.7). There is thusly a mirroring of dress styles and burial practice at both places: this does not necessarily reflect ethnicity in that it demonstrates Assyrians

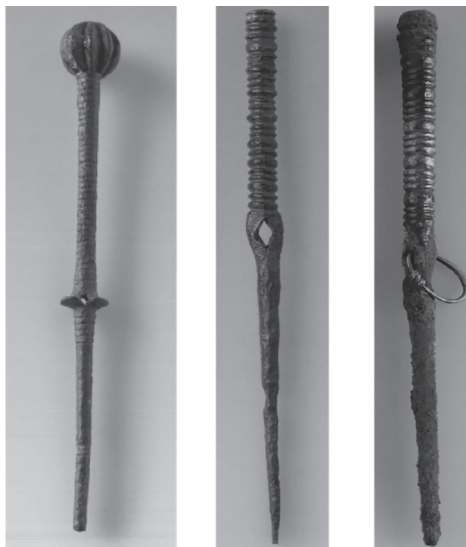


Fig. 2.6 Toggle-Pins from Kültepe-Kaneš (Kulakoğlu and Kangal 2010, 310, no. 351; 307, no. 341; 308, no. 342).

were buried in Anatolia, but rather points toward a shared material culture that travelled along the routes between the two places.

In addition to evidence from the intramural burials at Kültepe-Kaneš and the tombs at Aššur, cuneiform texts from Kültepe-Kaneš indicate that *tudittu* were not only the property of royal women or goddesses but belonged to merchants' wives and relatives as well.³ The nature of the archaeological recording has rendered it impossible to link a particular burial and its assemblage with an individual, as will be discussed below, but textual evidence illustrates that toggle-pins were part of the Assyrian woman's self-presentation and were tightly linked with an individual's economic agency. For example, a woman with the "good"

Assyrian name Lamassutum was married to trader Elamma and continued to live in Anatolia for several years after her husband's death. His archive was excavated in 1991/1992 and contained a memorandum listing Lamassutum's personal belongings at the time of her death (AKT 8, 164 in Veenhof 2017) in which she bequeathed her valuable possessions to her children back in Aššur:

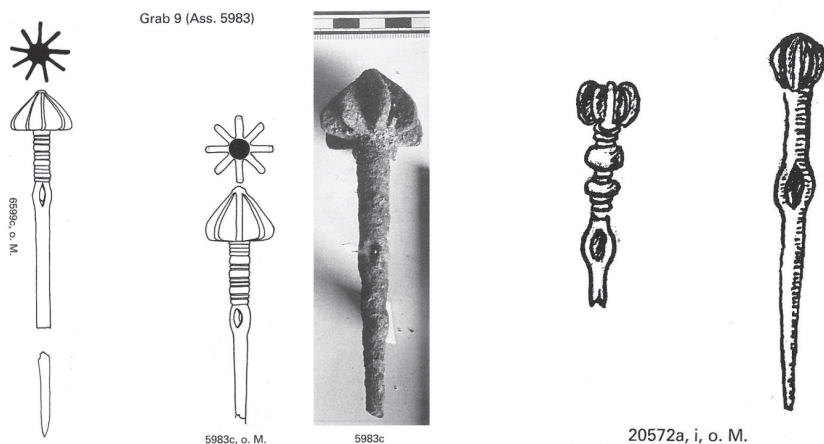


Fig. 2.7 Toggle-Pins from Aššur (Hockmann 2010, Tafel 77, 20572a, i; Tafel 29, 5983c; 6599c).

3 cups and toggle pins, their weight in silver 1 mina, under my seals; separately 26 shekels of silver also under my seals, *ikribū* of Elamma... All this, Lamassutum, the wife of Elamma, left behind, *Ištar-pālil*, Ennam-Suen, and Maši-ilī, Lamassutum's representative(s) will entrust to an affiliated trader and to her sons and they will bring it to the City and (there) my daughter, the *ugbabtu*-priestess, and my sons will act in accordance with the testamentary dispositions applying to them (Veenhof 2017, no. 164, lines 1–6 and 26–36).

In this instance, Lamassutum's toggle-pins are not buried with her, but instead sent back to the mother city as part of her property to be distributed amongst her children. It is possible that she was buried with another set like the royal women of Ebla, but whatever the case, it is clear from this letter that the "monetary" value of the pins was as integral to their value as any symbolic meaning associated with femininity. The toggle-pins functioned as portable wealth for women that could be transferred upon death. In another instance, the Assyrian merchant Aššur-muttabbil writes to his Anatolian wife Kunaniya and a male relative in Kaneš.

To Walhishna and Kunaniya; from Ashur-muttabbil –

To Walhishna:

Out of your sister's things I took in the City of Ashur for 1 mina of silver – both her rings and her toggle-pins, and I then instructed you there, saying: "For the silver...which I have taken, may both of the slave girls belong to him...!"

I keep hearing that Buzazu has seized your slave girls.

Confront the slave girls with kindness so that he releases them to you, (but) if he uses harsh words – indeed, does not release the slave girls – then proceed to court!

The slave girls belong to you! (Larsen 1988, 107).

The letter continues with various increments of silver he has left to them and a warning to watch over their affairs and household until he returns to Kaneš. It is clear that silver was needed quickly in order to settle this pressing matter concerning the slaves. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Aššur-muttabbil would search out the necessary fluid capital with an ascribed value in the precious materials at hand, namely a female relative's jewellery.

One particularly interesting reference to toggle-pins also concerns raw value of the precious objects: "We collected our toggle pins and paid (them) to the City Hall for the silver (owed as) price for the lapis lazuli" (CCT 4, 24a; Dercksen 2004; 19). In this letter, a woman named Tarām-kūbī, residing in Aššur, writes to her husband Innaya, currently in Kaneš, to complain that she, along with others (presumably women) had to hand over their toggle-pins to the City Hall to pay off an earlier debt in silver incurred by the merchants buying lapis lazuli. Unlike the previous letter, which concerned a private financial matter, this text illustrates both the collective economic agency of women through their material possessions, toggle-pins, and the co-option of that agency by the central authority, as opposed to individual male relative. This

letter also demonstrates that toggle-pins were a fairly common article of adornment and that the central authority, in this case the City Hall, was well aware of their raw value and could count on immediate access to that value due to their portable and ubiquitous nature. In the Old Assyrian period and beyond, toggle-pins were thus markers of female identity and status, but also functioned as portable wealth for both men and women. Moveable wealth like toggle-pins was especially important in mercantile societies where people were crossing and living in frontier zones, and where women were especially likely to engage in independent economic transactions. Allison Thomason has proposed such a scenario for textiles, which Old Assyrian women were involved in producing. I would argue that toggle-pins should be seen in the same light:

In a society that valued *movable* over landed property, it is not surprising that women play an equally important role in the ownership and management of such property, since the women were largely in charge of manufacturing and/or procuring such movable capital, mainly in the form of textiles. However, exchanges of other material culture must have led to the prominence of women in this period. Lumsden notes that luxury items and votive objects were often discussed in the tablets as traveling between Assyria and Anatolia and intended for family members of traders, along with more commercially-intended trade items of bulk silver and other goods (Thomason 2013, 109).

Toggle-pins and portable identities

Although locating identities in the archaeological record is problematic, it has been argued that it is a necessary enterprise, for no study of human behaviour can be divorced from the various categories which individuals and groups assign to themselves and others. As Timothy Insoll writes:

...the archaeology of identities is not some form of esoteric sub-discipline, rather it forms part of the total endeavor of archaeology, which Gosden (1994, 166) has described as “part of the perilous, but necessary, search for the things that bind and divide human groups locally and globally”. For the issue is really whether one can actually have an archaeology that is *not* concerned with identity (Insoll 2007, 1).

One category of identity – ethnicity – has proven particularly difficult to determine from material culture, as archaeologists seek to avoid culture-historical epistemology which simplistically correlates archaeological assemblages with ethnic groups. Not only are archaeological assemblages never representative of “all of the cultural artefacts” (Jones 1997, 108 citing Childe 1978, 36) of a single group, but the real or perceived differences between groups which constitute an ethnic boundary are not always reflected in artefact type, use pattern, or artistic style. Furthermore, ethnic groups as a category are not static; there are not only individual choices within an ethnic group but also the boundaries of that group can shift dependent on particular contexts, places, and over time (Jones 1997, Chapter 6; 108–119). It is a mistake to

reify fluid and/or non-existent ethnic groups through material culture and to flatten out the diversity of other types of identities which can exist within one group or community (Lucy 2005, 95).

How should we then think about objects like the toggle-pins which are prevalent across the ancient Near East throughout the 3rd and 2nd millennia, but only appear in central Anatolia, and in particular at Kültepe-Kaneš, during the MBA? I would argue that to talk about the “Assyrianness” or “Syro-Mesopotamianness” of such objects detracts from their role in a multicultural, middle-ground society such as Kültepe-Kaneš. It is clear that these objects were tethered to a distinctively Syro-Mesopotamian sphere of production and use, but it is unclear *who* actually wore them. The lower town at Kaneš was a proper working town with residential, commercial, and production areas and there is little evidence that the Assyrian merchants were physically separated from the rest of the population. As foreigners settling into already established neighbourhoods, the Assyrian community defined its social boundaries through its civic institutions instead of through urban planning: the *kārum* was a collective administrative body rather than a differentiated place within the lower town at Kültepe-Kaneš (Larsen 1976, 235).

Thomas Hertel (2014) has demonstrated that neighbourhoods in the lower town comprised households containing Assyrian archives alongside those with Anatolian archives. Furthermore, to define a household according to the owner of an archive found within is highly problematic for such a mobile population. For example, the archive of c. 200 texts belonging to the Assyrian merchant Ennam-Aššur, son of Šalim-ahum, was excavated in Room 2 of a three-room house (Özgüç 1986, 8, 76; Bilgiç and Günbattı 1995; Hertel 2014, 40). This archive covered a chronological span of fifty years including the period when Ennam-Aššur was active in Anatolia (c. 1883–1855) (Hertel 2014, 40). However, the archives reveal that Ennam-Aššur was frequently on the move, and when in Kaneš lived with his family including his son Šalim-ahum II – who worked as a travelling agent (Bilgiç and Günbattı 1995, no. 77; Hertel 2014, 41) and was thus only occasionally there, and older brother Aššur-Dan. In addition to family members, junior agents travelling through Kaneš and at least four female servants, though most likely more, are attested as belonging to the household (Hertel 2014, 41). The merchants during this period were often on the move and thus households were in flux, adding and subtracting members with the ebbs and flows of the long-distance trade. Furthermore, even in cases where objects excavated from intramural burials are recorded as from a particular house (Özgüç 1955), the stratigraphic relationship between burial and archive is difficult to integrate. In cases of houses belonging to couples of a mixed Assyro-Anatolian marriage, it becomes even harder to define the fluid demographics of the household. The kinship networks, and thus household units, cut across ethnic or civic identity lines: the dynamics of each household were very specific (Yazıcıoğlu-Santamaria 2015, 231).

By reframing the conversation to focus on the mobility of mercantile communities instead of on Assyrian or Syro-Mesopotamian objects, it becomes clear that the

portable nature of objects like toggle-pins is key to understanding them. Worn on the body, these objects could travel and take on new meanings and lives in foreign environments. It is highly likely that Anatolian women wore them, and it is possible that they took on new values in the Anatolian context. It is impossible to correlate a toggle-pin or weapon, for example, to a known individual. These portable items do, however, illustrate that the material culture of Kültepe-Kaneš, like the content gleaned from the texts, reflected the multicultural world of a long-distance trade network. In his characterization of the flourishing artistic traditions at Kaneš, Larsen speculates that:

It may not be too fanciful to regard the wonderfully playful pottery together with the seals...as a reflection of the intellectual ferment in this cosmopolitan society, where people spoke a variety of languages and marked their ethnic origins in their dress, their hairstyles, and probably their jewellery (Larsen 2015, 245).

I contend that a purposeful marking of ethnic identity or origins is too far of a stretch with the current evidence concerning toggle-pins, but Larsen's overall point is a good one. Personal adornment was a sure way for highly mobile people like merchants to carry and share a bit of home with them: it is not surprising that such objects appear in the multicultural households created by Assyrians and Anatolians at Kültepe-Kaneš.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank the editor and anonymous reviewer for their insightful and helpful comments and guidance. This contribution is much stronger due to their valuable input. The first inklings of this paper were inspired by conversation with Gojko Barjamovic and further developed through comments provided by Agnete Wisti Lassen, Yağmur Heffron, and Gökçe Bike Yazicioğlu-Santamaria when I first presented this paper in 2015. Jonathan Valk most kindly provided much-needed reference material available at Leiden. Gojko Barjamovic and Fikri Kulakoğlu provided the use of their images. I would also like to thank Lorenzo d'Alfonso for numerous conversations over the past few years on the material culture of Bronze Age Anatolia. Any mistakes are my own.
- 2 For a comprehensive overview of the Old Assyrian period and the history of scholarship on the period, see Veenhof 2008 with references therein. Michel 2003 and 2005/06 present a bibliography of the Old Assyrian Period as well as a list of the primary textual and archaeological sources. Recent publications by both Assyriologists and archaeologists have analyzed many facets of Assyrian and Anatolian society at Kültepe-Kaneš and other associated sites (Atici *et al.* 2014; Kulakoğlu and Michel 2015; Kulakoğlu and Barjamovic 2017).
- 3 It should be noted, however, that a letter containing an inventory of the goddess Ištar does also include her toggle-pins (kt c/k 18, rev. 44; Dercksen 2015, 40).

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Chapter 3

Male dress habits in Roman period Palmyra

Maura Heyn and Rubina Raja

Abstract

Palmyra, ancient Tadmor, was in the first three centuries CE a flourishing trade node in the Roman Empire. Situated as the last stop on the Silk Road, camel caravans were reloaded onto donkey caravans, and then went on to the areas west of Palmyra. Although having been under Hellenistic influence for centuries, the region displays little tangible evidence of exactly how such influence impacted the societies in the region. With Pompey's conquest in the 60s BCE, the region came under firm Roman control, and local societies responded to this interaction. This contribution looks at the material evidence from Palmyra from the period between the 1st century CE and the late 3rd century CE in order to gauge the way in which Palmyrene men were represented in the Palmyrene art. Most evidence stems from the funerary sphere, since the public and religious statuary largely has disappeared over the centuries. This paper considers the ways in which local and foreign clothing traditions impacted Palmyrene society and shaped the expression of male identities in this oasis city.¹

Introduction – sculptural habit and dress in Palmyra

Palmyra, ancient Tadmor, situated in the Syrian Desert halfway between the Euphrates River and the eastern Mediterranean coast, is known for its wealth of archaeological material. The city flourished in the first three centuries CE, when many of the Palmyrene elite were heavily involved in international trade, and the city was a nodal point for caravans (Seland 2015; Meyer *et al.* 2016). This wealth created the opportunity for the upper layers of society to represent themselves to each other as well as to the outside world. One group of sculptural representations, which gives us much information about the dress habits of the Palmyrenes, is the funerary sculpture.² This locally produced limestone sculpture representing the deceased was used widely

from the 1st century CE until Palmyra was sacked in 273 CE by the Roman emperor Aurelian and his troops in the wake of Zenobia's uprising against the Romans. Sculptural practice for representing the deceased includes busts on rectangular slabs, under life-size, full-body representations on stelae or slabs, and up to life-size, full-body representations on banqueting reliefs and later sarcophagus lids.³ The corpus of Palmyrene funerary sculpture amounts to more than 3,700 portraits – collected within the framework of the Palmyra Portrait Project since 2012 and which provide rich evidence for gendered differences in dress (Raja 2017b). With this material in hand, we have a unique overview of the sculptural practice and its development, providing new insight into trends, sartorial fashions, and the ways in which Palmyrenes used dress codes in order to express themselves in political, economic, and even military terms within their society and the wider world.

Palmyrene male representations in the Palmyrene funerary sphere

Most of the men and many women who are depicted in the sculptural representations in the Palmyrene tombs wore the same two basic garments: the tunic and cloak (Plates 3.1 and 3.2), which they would then embellish in various ways. In addition to the identifying inscription in Palmyrene Aramaic above one or both shoulders, the manner of draping the cloak, the attributes held, the gestures and arm positions displayed (Heyn 2010), the hair styles (and beard, for the men), and headdresses (for the women) all added variety to the individual representations. A look in particular at the garments and their embellishment, however, indicates that gendered differences in costume seem to rely most prominently on additions made to female dress. Women, for example, would commonly display embroidered bands and borders on their garments, fasten them at the left shoulder with intricate brooches, and embellish headdresses with pendants and other adornment items (Krag 2018). These embellishments to the female ensemble give the impression that women display more individuality in their modes of dress than do Palmyrene men. Such a pattern of dress behaviour, wherein the costumes of women were more complex and nuanced than the dress codes of male attire, was not uncommon in the Roman world and may have been related to the role of women in the negotiation of cultural identities, often also being the ones who would have changed family affiliations and location upon marriage for example (Rothe 2013, 265–66). Furthermore, female dress might have been intentionally crafted with the aim of being decorative, with decoration being used to highlight aspects of femininity and gender. A good comparison for this latter motivation is provided by female dress in the 19th century, especially that of elite women, that carried connotations of female leisure, sexuality, and hindered women from working (Barnard 2013, 122–125; Richards 2017, 242–244). This may have been the case in Palmyra as well (Krag 2018 for a monograph on representations of females in Palmyra).

In this contribution, we focus on the clothing worn by the Palmyrene males, exploring this obvious sameness, speculating as to why this was the case, and examining whether the evident uniformity was made up for through other visual means, such as attributes. We also ask whether specific identities were attached to clothing types or whether choice of clothing could have been determined by type of representation, whether the image was public/funerary/religious, a *loculus* relief, a banqueting relief, or sarcophagus (Butcher 2003, 328). Or, are these male portraits simply meant to be viewed as stereotypes, either as a result of mass production of such types or expressions of cultural affinities and a belonging to the Greek heritage of the region? And what was the case with the group of Palmyrene men and boys depicted with the so-called Parthian dress items, which seem to be more varied in both garment shape and decoration? While there is a lot of similarity in the male dress items generally worn by Palmyrene men, such as the *chiton* and *himation* or the so-called Parthian dress, a closer look at the individual dress items reveals that the dress codes that did not come from the Greco-Roman cultural sphere in particular were much more individualized and detailed than the renderings of the generally undecorated *chiton* and *himation*.

The male representations and male dress codes in Palmyra

Palmyrene men were depicted in a variety of contexts in Palmyra. The public, the civic, the funerary, and the religious spheres offered space and opportunity for portrait sculpture to be set up. In Palmyra, not much sculpture from the public and religious sphere survives. Marble statues, the stone of which was imported, have largely been looted or destroyed, as has bronze statuary. What survives is the local limestone sculptures and of this by far the largest group stems from the funerary sphere, since the closed environment of the graves protected the limestone from wear and tear.⁴ In Palmyra, statues were put up in large numbers in the cityscape (Yon 2002, 163). While the sculptures are gone, we know this from surviving inscriptions which were engraved on the bases of statues as well as on the many columns flanking the streets of Palmyra. Apart from being placed on bases, statues in Palmyra were also placed high up in the urban space, namely on consoles or protruding shelves located half way up on the columns along the streets. The stacked sculptural environment in the public sphere was a parallel to the dense portrait galleries encountered in the Palmyrene graves, the tower tombs, and the later underground tombs (*hypogea*), in which sometimes up to 400 burials could be placed (Raja *forthcoming*). The sculptural representations in the public sphere communicated the civic importance of Palmyrene individuals to the society as a whole, whereas emphasis in the funerary sphere was put on the importance of the individual within the broader context of the family. Palmyrene male representations make up approximately 60 percent of all aggregate portrait representations from

Palmyra (Raja 2015; Kropp and Raja 2016). Of these, about 20 percent depict the men as Palmyrene priests.

The chiton and himation as the dominant clothing fashion in Palmyra

As explained above, most Palmyrene males are represented wearing the chiton and himation in their funerary portraits (Stauffer 2012; Taha 1982). The chiton was a short-sleeved, undecorated, woollen tunic, often with a horizontal neck slit. The himation, also wool and usually unadorned, was a large, rectangular cloak that was worn draped around the body (Stauffer 2012) (Fig. 3.1). Occasionally, the tunic would be long-sleeved (Colledge 1976, 68) and the cloak would be draped differently, but the overwhelming impression is of male attire that is largely monotonous. The impact of polychromy, however, should be considered as a lost factor, as the colours would undoubtedly have changed the perception of the clothing items immensely and have created a detailed variation that we can no longer appreciate (see Sargent and Therkildsen 2010, 14). For example, the stripes that were popular additions to



Fig. 3.1 Loculus relief depicting a male bust, 150–200 CE. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, inv. B8906 (Image Courtesy of the Penn Museum, Image no. 295381).

the tunic in the 3rd century may have been painted with intricate designs (Padgett 2001). Notwithstanding any distinction that polychromy would have added, the position of the arms and the gestures of the hands in these portraits contribute to the visual sameness that is suggested by the similar dress choices: the majority of males wear their cloak draped in such a way to catch the right arm in the sling. The right hand is extended over the fold of this cloak, and the left hand is held in a parallel position against the torso. Many of these men also hold one of two common attributes in the left hand: a book roll, which is rendered as a narrow, rectangular object, or a leaf.

This mode of male representation is reminiscent of the style used for the depiction of freedmen on Roman funerary reliefs from the late Republic and early Empire (Butcher 2003, 329; Kleiner 1977), and the uniformity of the representation in Palmyra may be related to this connection. Any assumptions about the cultural statement associated with this costume choice, however, must contend with the

fact that this style of representation originated in the Greek world with the 4th century BCE statues of, for example, Aeschines, holding his arm against his chest in the sling created by the draping of his cloak (Bieber 1959). Funerary representations of men wearing the chiton and himation draped in a similar way subsequently appear in several of the Hellenistic city-states of Asia Minor and Syria in the mid-2nd and early 1st centuries BCE (Zanker 1993). Even though this type ('arm-sling') carried connotations of temperance and self-control in statues such as that of Aeschines, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods in the eastern Mediterranean, it encompassed a wider range of meanings, such as membership in the Greek-speaking koine and participation in civic culture and values, including benefaction, love for the fatherland, and so on. The ubiquity of the type in the public and funerary spheres reveals its success as an emblem of the good citizen (see Fejfer 2009, 196–197; Masségliia 2015; Trimble 2017). In addition to possible connections with an imperial city and/or communities further afield, the visual sameness of these portraits may also have demonstrated membership in the community of Palmyrenes; Michael Koortbojian (2009, 72) argued for a similar phenomenon with regard to the sculpted images of men wearing the toga in Rome: its ubiquity was related to its ability to communicate participation in a civic ideology. In other words, regardless of their provenance, the chiton and himation displayed in certain ways became emblematic of the collective identity in Palmyra.⁵ Alternatively, the relatively plain chiton and himation may simply have been fashionable in Palmyra in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE with the number of men choosing alternative styles of dress and additional adornment increasing in each century (Butcher 2003, 329). It is also possible that the Greco-Roman tunic and cloak, although a popular costume choice for the funerary sphere, was less familiar than so-called Parthian attire and this lack of familiarity resulted in less experimentation.

Less than 4 percent of the men who wore the stereotypical chiton and himation added variety to their portraits with wreaths, decorative stripes, or fringes (Figs 3.2 and 3.3). For example, twenty of the men are wearing wreaths on their head that are similar to those decorating the priestly hats (see below). Remnants of paint on one of these leafy crowns suggests that the leaves were gold leaf rather than vegetal (Michalowski 1964, 172; Stucky 1973, 173), adding to the impact both in terms of visual appearance and the suggestion of wealth. The garments of another twenty-one men featured a stripe or fringe on their garment; others displayed a scalloped hem on their cloaks, or a beaded trim on an additional shirt worn under the tunic.⁶ In addition to this small group of men whose portraits were more distinctive, Palmyrene priests also stand out.

Palmyrene priestly dress

The priestly status of some Palmyrene men was signified by their attire (Fig. 3.4).⁷ In a few cases representations are accompanied by inscriptions, which underline the fact that these men were priests. Men acting as priests either wear, or appear

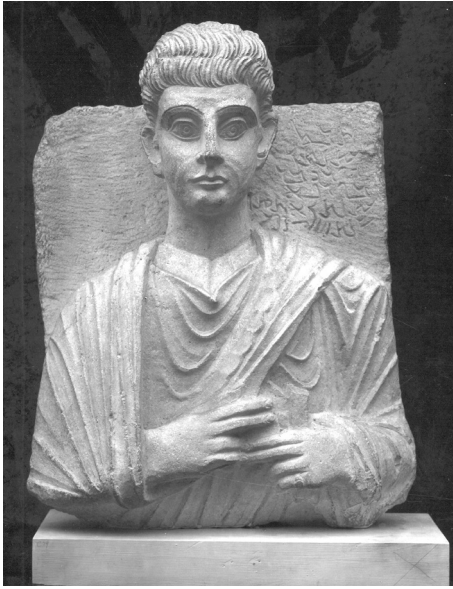


Fig. 3.2 Loculus relief depicting a male bust, 133/134 CE. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, inv. IN 1049 (© Palmyra Portrait Project, Ingholt Archive at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, PS 4).



Fig. 3.3 Loculus relief depicting two male busts, 200–273 CE. Archaeological Museum, Istanbul, inv. 3823/O.M.325 (© Palmyra Portrait Project, Ingholt Archive at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, PS 259).

with a hat particular to Palmyra, a cylindrical hat with a flat top, most likely made in some sort of stiff textile or felt. These priestly hats could be elaborately decorated with encircling wreaths made in floral designs, decorated at the centre with representations of precious stone jewels or small male busts, sometimes in medallions, either of a young male person without any attributes or of a priest. Priests often wear tunics which are more decorated than those seen on other male representations. Finally, they wear cloaks, often also partly decorated and sometimes fastened with large, elaborate brooches. These, although not exclusive to Palmyrene priests, do seem to have particular associations with them, as they are shown worn by 82 out of 278 priests (29 percent of all the priest representations), perhaps underlining the elite status of the families from which the Palmyrene priests came. Priests also often carry items that explicitly associate them with priesthood, namely the small libation pitcher and the incense bowl. Often these items were also decorated, and so could act as identifying characteristic objects that could further personalize the portraits. The variation in the decorative motifs used on libation pitchers and bowls thus added to the individuality of the represented figure, and separated his image further from the other male portraits within the tomb (see also Heyn 2018).



Fig. 3.4 Loculus relief depicting a bust of a priest, unknown location, 100–150 CE (© Palmyra Portrait Project, Ingholt Archive at Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, PS 794).

Banqueting reliefs and sarcophagi

Banqueting reliefs were also used in the funerary sphere in Palmyra (Fig. 3.5). These most often show men in so-called Parthian clothing: a tunic, a long, draping cloak, wide trousers, and soft boots. The garments are richly embellished, reflecting clothes with richly woven patterns and/or embroidered bands, as well as boots possibly made of soft leather that was later embroidered or had added sewn pieces (compare with the boot found in the Pazyryk burial mound 2, now at the State Hermitage Museum, inv. no. 1684–218: Rudenko 1970, 87). Such attire was usually found in banqueting scenes and is also used in the numerous sarcophagus lids scenes from Palmyra. In the 2nd century CE, sarcophagi were introduced as grave monuments in Palmyra. Fragments from more than 400 of these sarcophagi exist, underlining that this monument type became quite popular. The boxes display up to seventeen individuals, but the norm was to show three or four portraits

in bust form. Their massive lids, which could hold representation of up to eight individuals on one lid,⁸ often display men, women, and children alongside each other, with the more important figures shown in larger scale, reclining, and holding bowls or other vessels. Usually one to three men were represented reclining, with women, children, and other male figures shown in smaller scale.⁹ Men or boys wearing the chiton and himation are shown in the background of the scene standing behind the reclining figure(s). For these reclining figures, Parthian attire is preferred over the chiton and himation. Men wearing the Parthian costume outnumber those in the Greco-Roman tunic and cloak by two to one (Heyn 2008, 177). When the reclining males within a group wear different styles of costume, the male in Parthian dress seems to have pride of place, while the male in chiton and himation is always shown in second position, behind the figure who wears Parthian dress (Heyn 2008, 178). This might indicate that there was a hierarchy of figures and costumes in these scenes, with the more honoured figures in Parthian dress, and the figures in ancillary or secondary roles either in Parthian or Greco-Roman style of dress. This, in turn, suggests that proper Palmyrene banqueting attire might have been the Parthian-inspired dress items. The fact remains that dress codes could be and were combined in banqueting scenes. Greco-Roman style dress could be used alongside Parthian-style clothing, even though Parthian-style clothes were perhaps seen as more popular or



Fig. 3.5 Banquet relief depicting a reclining priest and a seated female, 146/147 CE. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, inv. IN 1159 and IN 1160 (Courtesy of Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, photo by Palmyra Portrait Project).

appropriate for banquets. Across all types of Palmyrene sculpture, only 17 percent of Palmyrene males were depicted in Parthian clothing.¹⁰ What Parthian style dress did allow for was showing off much more detail than the Greco-Roman-style dress, which tended to be much plainer, and had limited areas that allowed for decoration, namely the border of the himation, and, on occasion, one or two bands that extended downwards from the neckline. In contrast, Parthian-style clothing offered multiple areas for decoration: the neckline, the central part, the cuffs, and the hemline of the tunic, the central part of the trouser legs, and the borders of the cloak.

The significance of production economy and textiles in the Palmyrene sculptural habit

Textiles – both high quality linen as well as decorated and fine and delicate fabrics, such as silks – were expensive items in antiquity. In Palmyra, we know that luxury textiles from all over the known world were traded, and silks from as far away as China have been attested in Palmyra (Stauffer 2012 as well as Schmidt-Colinet 1995 and Schmidt-Colinet, Al-As'ad and Chehade 2005). The famous Tax Tariff of the 2nd century CE was set up in Palmyra in order to regulate the trade moving through the city, but it also adds to our knowledge about the textile trade (Shifman 2014). Textiles,

more than any other material (leather, for example), were used for creating various and numerous clothing items, and were essential for covering one's body. One could, so to say, not do without it. The fact that Palmyrene sculptural representations put so much emphasis on textiles, and that their rendering can be extremely detailed, does alert us to the fact that textiles could be used for showing off one's wealth. A himation – although it might have been plain – would have taken up several metres of cloth and therefore in itself would have been a pricey clothing item. A tunic, although not consisting of that much fabric, could have pearl borders sewn around the neck and sleeves, for example, and therefore been an expensive item. The Parthian-style clothing items, however, take the representation of wealth through textiles to an altogether different level. These ornamented items display considerable wealth, but also give insight into the rich world of textile patterns available to Palmyrene customers, sculptors, and craftsmen. Textile pieces found in tombs include Chinese silk imports, as well as locally-made fabrics, some of which have adaptations of Chinese patterns. They reveal a wide variety of patterns, ranging from simple but expensive, purple-dyed bands, to elaborate floral, vegetal, or geometric patterns, displayed in juxtaposed bands, placed around textile borders, or covering all the area of the fabric. The comparison between the patterns on these fabrics and those shown in sculpture shows that sculptors were familiar with, and replicated contemporary clothing, perhaps even using the same pattern books as craftsmen working on wool or linen (Schmidt-Colinet, Stauffer and Al-As'ad 2000) (Plate 3.3). Such dress items show that Palmyrenes were concerned with showing off such knowledge about dress codes both internally in the family graves, but also to the outside world in the public sphere. This can be inferred by the frequent use of Parthian-style clothing in banqueting scenes that, more than likely, reflected contemporary Palmyrene practices and customs. Dress and clothing items were highly loaded with messages about knowledge of the world not only locally but also on a much more global scale.

Conclusion

While the chiton and himation worn by most men depicted in the Palmyrene funerary portraits are less adorned than the garments of many Palmyrene women, the simplicity of the ensemble should not be equated with a lack of significance for the identity of the deceased. On the contrary, the general uniformity of the style and manner in which these male garments were worn likely contributed to a sense of cohesion and inclusion in the Palmyrene community. Alongside this potential significance of the Palmyrene dress code is the acknowledgement that male dress in Palmyra was much more detailed and elaborated than until now accepted in scholarship. While a cursory examination gives the impression that men either wore Greco-Roman style clothing or Parthian banqueting clothes, it becomes clear when looking more closely at the male dress divided on the types of sculpture at hand in Palmyra that dress codes were combined in a variety

of ways. This variety of choices indicates that the decision to be displayed in chiton and himation was deliberate, as was the selection of Parthian attire or the choice of a long, draped cloak over Parthian tunic and trousers. Much more than indicating loyalty or adherence to one cultural sphere, the way in which the various garments were used and combined underlined the Palmyrene local knowledge about the dress codes available in the global world of which they were a firm part. Even the relatively uniform chiton and himation enabled identification as part of the local and/or regional community, but also allowed for a certain amount of individualization.

Notes

- 1 Rubina Raja thanks the Carlsberg Foundation for funding the Palmyra Portrait Project and both authors thank Aarhus University Research Foundation for granting Maura Heyn a visiting professorship in 2018 to come and work together with the Palmyra Portrait Project group.
- 2 For the two standard works on Palmyrene funerary portraiture and Palmyrene art in general, see Ingholt 1928 and Colledge 1976.
- 3 For the history of Palmyra, see Smith 2013, Sartre-Fauriat & Sartre 2008, Sartre-Fauriat & Sartre 2014 and Sartre-Fauriat & Sartre 2016. For the tombs in general, see Gawlikowski 1970, Sadurska & Bounni 1994 and Henning 2013.
- 4 On the quarries of Palmyra, see Schmidt-Colinet 2017.
- 5 For a similar phenomenon behind representational choices for freedmen in Rome, see George 2005, 53–54.
- 6 For example, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, I. N. 1048 has beaded trim visible on his undershirt (Ploug 1995, 178, cat. 72).
- 7 See the recently published article by Raja 2017a, also for further references. Further on priests, see Raja 2017e, 2017d, 2017c and 2018.
- 8 Sarcophagus in Palmyra Museum (Seyrig 1937, 21, fig. 12; Will 1951, 87–88, fig. 7–8; Parlasca 1984, 290–291, fig. 7; Schmidt-Colinet 1992, vol. II, pl. 73a; Wielgosz 1997, 71, pl. 4.1).
- 9 Sarcophagus box in Palmyra Museum, inv. no. B 2723/9160 (Rumscheid 2000, 222–223, cat. 271, pl. 65.1–3; Kaizer 2002, 180, pls. 5–6; Schmidt-Colinet & al-As'ad 2007, 276–278, pl. 90; Sartre-Fauriat & Sartre 2008, 77; Wielgosz-Rondolino 2016, 77–79, fig. 17a–c).
- 10 This number stems from the Palmyra Portrait Project database.

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Part Two

Sacred fashions

Chapter 4

Dressed to heal, protect and rule: vestiges of shamanic praxis in ancient Near Eastern rituals and beliefs

Diana L. Stein

Abstract

The white coat of a doctor, the wig and black robe of a judge, and the crown and staff of a sovereign are items of dress that we associate with today's professional healers, protectors, and rulers. For many people they provide reassurance, inspire confidence and trust, and promote a feeling of identity and pride. How did this dress code begin and what makes it so effective? Drawing on results in the fields of evolutionary psychology and theatre studies, this paper re-examines the evidence for masks and masking in the ancient Near East, beginning with the evidence of the Pre Pottery Neolithic period (c. 10,000–6500 BCE) and following the threads through the Bronze Age (c. 3000–1200 BCE). Full, life-size masks are diagnostic of a mode of performance that is uniquely human, and their miniature counterparts shed light on the status and gender of some of its key performers. The atmosphere at these performances tends to be highly charged, and the relics often become powerful symbols of transformation in their own right. These, I argue, were easily adapted to suit the agenda of later political and religious leaders, who inherited the roles of healing, protecting, and ruling from the shamanic figures of the past.¹

Among the many aesthetic devices used in ritual performance to instil and reinforce belief, one of the oldest and most effective is dress. In the ancient Near East, the role of dress in ritual practice has a long history and is amply documented. Whereas the textual references begin in the 3rd millennium BCE (Oppenheim 1943, 1949; Wiggermann 1996; Collins 2002), the material and visual evidence takes us back to the 10th millennium BCE. Current interest in the subject of masks, masking, and masquerades has prompted several studies based on evidence from the ancient Near East (Hershman 2014; Berlejung and Filitz 2018; Dietrich *et al.* 2018; Garfinkel 2018). Thus far, discussions have focused on problems of defining and identifying

the costumes and the nature of the associated rituals, while some also touch on a wider inquiry into the theory and practice of masquerades (e.g. Foster 2016, 69). This investigation takes a closer look at early ritual behaviour and its relationship with modes of performance and transformation. Rituals are designed to be performed, and their performance draws on a range of theatrical techniques. When compared with modalities of modern performance, early ritual practice in the ancient Near East seems less outlandish and the underlying shamanistic methods and objectives more rational and controlled. Indeed, as Antonin Artaud remarked (1958 [1938], 134–135), shamanistic traditions have been an important seedbed for theatre. Both ancient and modern traditions of performance use dress to achieve transformation. What differs is the degree to which this transformation is accomplished. The vestiges of Near Eastern masquerades hint at the emotional potency of ritual masking and provide insight into the transformative power of dress and the role of women in ritual performance.

Evolutionary psychology and early ritual behaviour

Research into ritual behaviour was traditionally based on human practice. Most sociological and psychological theorizing about religion rests on the results of anthropological studies, which began in the late 19th century. The focus of inquiry into the evolutionary beginnings of religious practice then shifted to the ritualized behaviour of children, and today many scholars have turned their attention to animal behaviour (Burghardt 2018, 28–32). This trend is also reflected within the field of Old World Archaeology. Certain Near Eastern rituals of the Neolithic period are thought to be modelled on the dances of cranes and vultures (Russell and McGowan 2003), and the epiphanic dance of the Aegean Bronze Age is said to resemble the hive dances of the honey bee and the aerial acrobatics of the barn swallow (Foster 2017).

All social animals perform rituals to signal an attitude or intention to fellow members of the species. Ritualization usually consists of everyday behaviour patterns taken out of context and simplified, repeated, exaggerated, and elaborated (Dissanakaye 2018, 88). The dance of the Common Crane, for example, involves bowing, pirouetting, strutting, running, leaping, and the beating of wings. What role its human counterpart played at Çatalhöyük is unclear. The discovery of a single wing that may have formed part of a costume suggests a small-scale performance, possibly mimicking the dance of two mating cranes. But cranes also dance in groups, an occurrence that may be depicted both at Bouqras, a contemporary Pre Pottery Neolithic (PPN) B site in southeastern Syria, and at Göbekli Tepe, an older PPN A site in southeastern Turkey (Clason 1989/90; Notroff 2016). The group dance has a number of functions, one of which is to alleviate tensions (Russell and McGowan 2003, 451). In humans, analogous activities involving music, dance, and rhythmic beats produce a similar reaction due to the release of “endorphins” and oxytocin. Studies show that participants at such group events experience a higher pain threshold, lower levels of depression, anxiety, and fatigue, and an increase in vigour, self-confidence, and

social comfort (Dissanakaye 2018, 93). Besides helping to diffuse stress, such highly coordinated actions have the adaptive value of promoting peaceful interaction, social cohesion, and group defence.

Mimicry and coordinated action also play an important role in the hunt. The hunting skills of feral cats, for example, include stalking, blending in with the environment, and vocal mimicry. Much of this predatory behaviour is innate in humans as well, but where some animals use physical camouflage, humans adopt body paint and dress. Mimicry involving the use of masks, furs, feathers, and skins marks a new stage in the cognitive evolution of humans, who alone seem to develop a capacity for pretence (Smith 2018, 53).² An example of this distinctly human activity may be illustrated in wall paintings at Çatalhöyük, where hunters are shown in action. Their costumes (often feline) do not resemble their prey (auroch and deer). Rather than acting as living decoys, some of these hunters seem to be engaged in a ritual preliminary to the hunt; one that involves identification with another more powerful being and uses this experience to one's advantage (Fig. 4.1).³

Rituals designed to assist the hunt by engaging the help of spirits in animal form usually involve a shaman figure, widely associated with hunter-gatherer and small-scale agricultural societies (Burkert 1979). The remains and depictions of what appear to be spiritual practitioners have long been suspected, and are now generally recognized at a number of sites in and around the ancient Near East (*e.g.* Stein 2006; Benz and Bauer 2015; Tully and Crooks 2015). Among the oldest evidence is a carefully constructed Late Natufian burial at Hilazon Tchtit, which contains an elderly female accompanied by token animal parts that are indicative of a shaman's

status and role (Grosman and Munro 2016). Other clues to the presence of shamans include surreal settings designed for ceremonial purposes, depictions of hybrid creatures and enigmatic images, and items of clothing and equipment associated with these events. All such clues exist at Göbekli Tepe, a site characterized by a series of megalithic enclosures built for ritual ceremonies, all of which follow the same basic internal design that appears to mirror the activities performed within. Two large pillars with indications of shoulders, arms, hands, and clothing carved in



Fig. 4.1 Detail of wall-painting of bull hunt. Çatalhöyük, Level V. 1.19 m × 3.35 m (Hodder 2006, fig. 38).



Fig. 4.2 Front of central Pillar 18. Göbekli Tepe, Enclosure D (photo Nico Becker, © DAI, GT2-Nacht-4410).

relief, stand like superhuman agents at the centre of the circular space, surrounded by a congregation of smaller anthropoid pillars with T-shaped capitals arranged around the periphery (Dietrich *et al.* 2012, 679). Recalling the burial of the female shaman-figure, the central anthropoid pillars are adorned with animal motifs such as foxes, snakes, scorpions, and the like. In some cases, they are also depicted “wearing” a fox pelt loincloth, and the possibility that they actually did so is strengthened by the fact that several pillars have perforations to which clothing could have been fastened (Fig. 4.2). Moreover, fox remains make up 7 percent of the faunal material, and a fox tail was excavated directly in front of one pillar (Peters *et al.* 2014, 179). Whether this particular fox tail was attached to Pillar 18 or worn by the lead performer inside Enclosure D, it was considered sacred enough to be deposited in a meaningful way, near the central pillar, along with other items of ritual paraphernalia like strange stone sculptures and miniature masks (Dietrich *et al.* 2018, 11–17). Indeed, it appears that everything connected with the ceremonial performances, including the enclosures themselves, were buried to preserve their sanctity and also, perhaps, to contain their power.

Modes of performance and transformation

The shaman’s primary role is to mediate between the human and the spirit worlds. The need for mediation arises at times of crisis or transition, such as prior to a hunt or battle, during illness, or after death. Mediating rituals take place in specially consecrated settings and often involve a participating audience. The objective of mediation, to gain knowledge and power from a higher source, is achieved by progressing through a range of experiential states. Difficult though it may be to demarcate the different experiential states, John Emigh, drawing on research in developmental psychology, identifies two extremes: that of identifying with the “self” and that of identifying with the “other”. In between these extreme modes is a continuum, he suggests, that would “begin with the experience of performing within everyday life, continue through the experiences of pretending and character acting, and conclude with the experience of being visited or possessed by a spiritual entity other than one’s self” (Emigh 1996, 22).

Pretence implies adopting another’s attributes and characteristics (or their quintessential traits) without integrating those attributes into the self. While the actor may mimic another’s voice, movements, and appearance, he retains his own identity. The experience is referential, and the audience observes second-hand.

In character acting, the performative mode traditionally associated with drama, actors aim at a transformation of their identities. Becoming another character implies losing one's "self-consciousness" or "ego",⁴ but the illusion of character is very much controlled and experienced by the actor; in fact, the better the impersonation, the greater the control. The effect of the illusion can be contagious, and audiences often find it difficult to distinguish between the actor and the character. At best, their willingness to suspend belief makes them complicit in the performance.

The transition from character acting to possession is described as a quantum leap. In this mode, the performer enters into a trance, and his sense of self is replaced by that of another entity. The "illusion" becomes the "reality". The performer experiences this mode as a passive state, has no conscious control over it, and retains little memory of what occurred while performing. Not often experienced by actors in Western drama, the possession mode is more common in religious and curative rites, where performers are priests or spiritual healers. Present day examples of spirit possession ceremonies range from Siberia to Sri Lanka in Asia and the tundra of North American Eskimos to the rain forests of West Africa (Emigh 1996, 14), and are often associated with liminal occasions such as funerals, anniversaries, exorcisms, and initiations. The performers have mastered techniques to enter and exit the trance state on cue, and it is this capacity that differentiates the experience from psychosis, characterized by extreme dissociation or chronic identification with the "other". By all accounts, "the atmosphere attending such alchemical performances tends to be highly charged, and depending upon the nature of the spiritual entity tapped, may be characterized by laughter, fear, reverence, or some combination of all three" (Emigh 1996, 29).

Full or partial masks may be used in character acting, but in the possession mode, full masks tend to be the norm as they conceal the identity of the performer and thus facilitate the transference of identity.⁵ They function as the conduit for a "visiting" entity, be it an ancestor, a master of animals, or a mythic elaboration of divine powers. Through their active role in channelling the spiritual forces into the performer's body, masks often acquire an animate character. Their production is a sacred matter. They undergo ritual consecration before they can be used in ritual ceremonies, and they are themselves the recipient of regular ritual performance. As animated icons, masks serve both as a representation of power and as the source of power itself. Indeed, some masks were considered to be so highly charged with the spirit's essence that they had to be destroyed because it was too dangerous to touch them after the conclusion of the ritual ceremonies (McNamara 2011, 28).

A similar scenario might account for the discoveries at Göbekli Tepe, where great care was taken to bury each enclosure together with its cultic equipment, including items of dress. As masks and masking seem to be particularly diagnostic of shamanistic behaviour and its associated beliefs, what does this evidence add to the picture?

Vestiges of masked performance: Neolithic

The chance find of a fox tail at Göbekli Tepe and the fragment of a crane's wing at Çatalhöyük are reminders that most costumes and masks are likely to have been made of organic materials that have not survived. Representations of human and humanoid figures with bird-like features or animal skins support this impression.⁶ The masks that have been found are made of stone or clay and display human features. In Angelika Berlejung's catalogue of masks from the southern Levant, fifteen life-size examples are attributed to the PPN B period (Berlejung 2018). All are full masks, most of which are wearable, but just two of these come from a recognizable context – broken and discarded together with other cultic objects at the cave site of Nahal Hemar (Bar Yosef and Alon 1988). Only a fragment of one remains, but the other mask was restorable and shows signs of repeated use (Fig. 4.3). The remote cave location, like that of the shaman burial, suggests that the objects were considered too potent to be buried close to habitation. The presence of decorated skulls may link the entire deposit at Nahal Hemar to funerary rites. While this is thought to be the main function of the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe and would be consistent with evidence at Çatalhöyük, the latter site also includes depictions of hunt-related rituals, and shamans are known to mediate in other situations as well (Hodder 2006; Schmidt 2010, 243).⁷

Also included in the recent surveys of Neolithic masks are two miniature examples that are likewise attributed to the PPN B period: one from a private collection; the other from Nevalı Çori (Berlejung 2018, no. 11; Garfinkel 2018, fig. 11.2). Slightly older, perhaps, are two miniature masks from Jerf el Ahmar (Fig. 4.4), and older still are

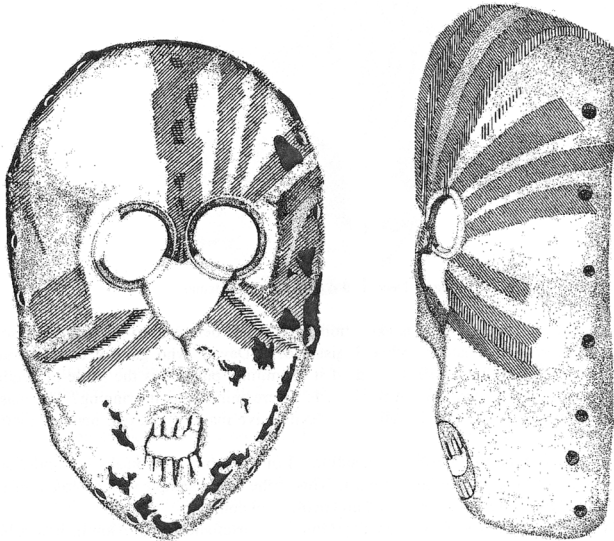


Fig. 4.3 Life-size mask. Nahal Hemar. H 26.50 cm, 1.80 kg (drawing by F. Vainer, T. Mazzola, © Department of Image Resources and Copyright Management of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem).



Fig. 4.4 Miniature mask. Jerfel Ahmar. H 4.30 cm. Discovered on the site's eastern prominence. Mission Permanente El Kowm-Mureybet (ministère Affaires Etrangères France). Fouille de Jerfel Ahmar, Direction D. Stordeur.

three further examples from Göbekli Tepe (Dietrich *et al.* 2018, 4–8). The six excavated mini masks have an average height of 4.6 cm. To the extent that their contexts can be identified, they too are associated with deposits of disused cultic paraphernalia. Their purpose remains enigmatic. The fact that in most cases the reverse is grooved or concave suggests that they could have been attached to furniture, a standard, or a composite figurine (Stordeur 2015, 341–342), or might have served as amulets (Garfinkel 2018, 148). This last suggestion connects these objects to a group of miniature masks dating to the Late Bronze Age, a comparison which offers yet another interpretation.

Vestiges of masked performance: Late Bronze Age

Miniature masks of stone and clay exist in the Late Bronze Age (LBA),⁸ but the largest and most distinctive group is made of faience (sintered quartz) (Parrot 1969; Kühne 1974; Peltenburg 1977; Caubet and Pierrat-Bonnefois 2005, 61–65). So far, over forty-five examples have been found distributed between Cyprus and Elam. They have concave interiors and average around 5.0 cm in height. The products of local workshops, each mask was individually made by hand or moulded, and then decorated with glaze and inlaid features. The better-preserved examples still retain traces of inlaid eyes, eyebrows, and necklaces (Fig. 4.5). Although some masks are too faded to establish their gender, the presence in many cases of features that are distinctly feminine such as pierced nasal septums, diadems, and long hair braids or tresses, suggests that all of the faience masks represent females (Peltenburg 1977, 179). This identification is strengthened by the fact that several were found in temple precincts dedicated to goddesses: Pinikir in Choga Zanbil, Ishtar in Tell al Rimah, and Gula in

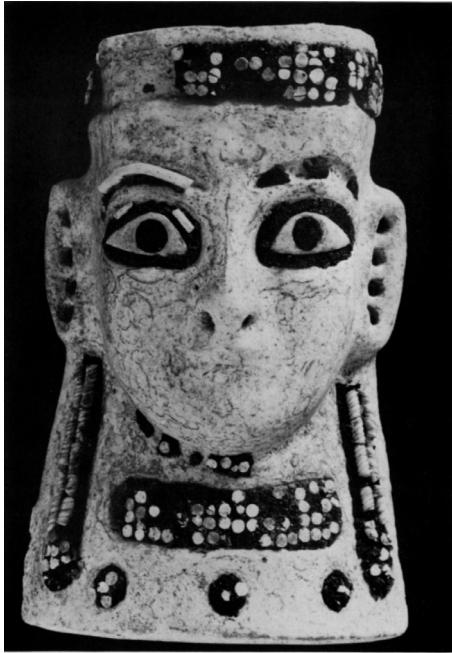


Fig. 4.5 Faience mask. Tel al Rimah, Level I, Temple cella. H 11.80 cm. IM (Oates 1966, pl. XXXIVa, Courtesy British Institute for the Study of Iraq).

Isin. Three others accompanied the burial of prestigious individuals, two of whom were female. One of them, buried within the Giparu at Ur, may have been a high priestess of Nanna and thus of royal lineage.⁹ The other, buried in the palace courtyard at Mari, is even more informative. Decked out in a diadem of carnelian pomegranate beads, gold earrings, and a necklace, not only does she resemble the faience masks, but she was also wearing one on her chest (Parrot 1937, 83–84). Some of these shiny and colourful miniature faience masks thus appear to have been worn as pendants or sewn into garments.

Their predominant association with temples and tombs recalls the cultic contexts of the miniature Neolithic masks. The relative scarcity of the faience pendant masks – usually one and seldom more than three per site – is also comparable, as is their perceived function as amulets worn for protection (Kühne 1974; Peltenburg 1977). The two examples from Ur and Mari that accompanied high ranking women to the

grave suggest yet another function. In alluding to ritual masking and the possession state, a role that would be consistent with the status of their owners, both may also have served as an emblem of office.

There are no contemporary LBA representations of richly attired royal woman or priestesses (Peltenburg 1977, 178), but earlier parallels do exist and are illuminating. The elaborate headdress of the LBA woman in grave 236 at Mari recalls the second headdress of Puabi, who was buried in the Royal Cemetery of Ur and who some identify as a high priestess (Moorey 1977). Found lying beside her body, this Early Dynastic diadem also includes clusters of pomegranates, this time interspersed between gold animals arranged around a headband of white leather covered with minute lapis lazuli beads. There are also striking parallels between the faience pendant masks of the LBA and the conventional portrayal of high priestesses during the Akkad and Isin Larsa periods. According to Claudia Suter's survey of contemporary imagery and texts, the high priestesses of that time are distinguished by their attire and hairstyle (Suter 2007, 317, 331, figs 1–5, 7). They too wore unique headdresses, and their long hair hung loose, sometimes with one tress in front of the ear like the faience mask from Tell al Rimah (Fig. 4.5). As the office of high-priestess was occupied by one holder

at a time and their tenure lasted a lifetime, the associated emblems would be rare. This might account for the scarcity of miniature masks, if, as seems possible, those of the Neolithic period belonged to shamans and those of the Late Bronze Age, to high priestesses.

Women in ritual performance

Historically women, particularly young women, were excluded from a male-dominated world of ritual masking (McNamara 2011, 32–44). In antiquity, it is often difficult to establish the sex of the ritual performers, especially when disguised by masks, but what little evidence we do have from the ancient Near East supports a role for mature women in ritual practice. The female shaman-figure, who was carried to a remote cave at Hilazon Tachtit and buried with great care, was about forty-five years old and had a limp (Grosman and Munro 2016).¹⁰ At the PPN sites of Tel Halula in Syria and Çatalhöyük in central Anatolia, depictions of ritual dances include what appear to be well-endowed female participants (Molist 1998, 84, fig. 4; Hodder 2006, pls 15–16). Çatalhöyük is also noted for the prevalence of female figurines. Many are representations of mature women whose interpretation is far from clear (Meskell 2007; Voigt 2007). However, the famous “mother goddess” figurine seated on a leopard throne with her feet resting on skulls, giving birth to an animal (Hodder 2006, pl. 24), could qualify as an elderly shaman-figure. Recent discoveries of several mature female figurines that seem to have been intentionally deposited on or close to the floor, sometimes together with an assemblage of worked bone and stone artefacts, may relate to a burial of the house or an event that took place within it (Bogdan 2004; Hodder 2016, figs 1–2). As Ian Hodder notes, these images seem to represent older women who have gained status and prestige in the community through their lifetimes.¹¹ A similar status may be presumed in the case of the later *entu*-priestesses, whose tenure lasted a lifetime. The faience pendant masks of the LBA suggest that some of them may have played an active role in ritual masking that involved possession.

Spanning the temporal gap

As several scholars have noted, there is little evidence for masks of any size between the Neolithic and Late Bronze Age. Exceptions include one incomplete Middle Bronze Age (MBA) clay mask from Tell el-Fara’ah North (Cornelius 2018, 125, n. 63) and a miniature mask of the same date from palace VII at Alalakh (Peltenburg 1977, 180, fig. 220). Edgar Peltenburg (1977, 183) also refers to a number of Levantine gold pendant plaques that date between the 16th and 14th centuries BCE and are often found buried with hoards. Like the faience masks of the LBA, these plaques are decorated with female heads that wear jewellery and have long hair. It is difficult to imagine men wearing these pendant plaques. Their subject matter and precious material are more in keeping with high-status women, who – like the LBA owners of miniature

faience masks – may have had a role in ritual masking rites that hark back to earlier shamanistic traditions. Indeed, one of the more explicit gold pendant plaques depicts a female figure holding goats while standing on a lion (Negbi 1970, 3–7). The “Master/Mistress of Animals”, a familiar motif that echoes the shaman’s role in early hunter-gatherer and agricultural societies, appears on jewellery, pottery, and seals from the 5th to 2nd millennia BCE (Hole 2010; Stein *forthcoming*). Together with other imagery relating to possession mode performance (see below), this suggests that long after the advent of agriculture and urban societies, aspects of these early hunting traditions continue to be widely referenced and understood (Stein 2006).

Depictions of masks and people wearing masks also help fill in the temporal gap. Yosef Garfinkel’s survey of Neolithic and Chalcolithic depictions from the Near East (2018, 153–161) extends from Jordan to Iran. One exceptional engraving from Dhuweila, a PPN B hunting camp in the basalt steppe of eastern Jordan, shows a group of dancing figures with sticks or weapons and possible indications of costumes and headdresses (Fig. 4.6). Another masked procession, this time painted on the wall of a Chalcolithic house at Teleilat el-Ghassul (Plate 4.1), has no clear connection with the hunt (Drabsch 2015), but the association between masks and dancing figures exhibiting their prey survives on pottery and seals through the 2nd millennium BCE. Among the dancers depicted on Chalcolithic and Bronze Age pottery and seals (Garfinkel 2003, 47–54; Hole 2010) are women, some of whom wear masks and hold animals. One can only speculate as to their age, but perhaps, given the aforementioned evidence for female participation in ritual practice, our inclination to see young fertility figures in these and many other cases ought to be reconsidered.¹²

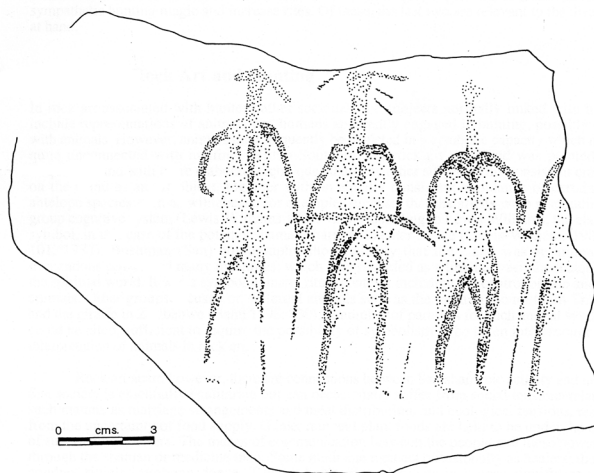


Fig. 4.6 Rock engraving of dancing hunters(?) in costume. Dhuweila (Betts 2002, fig. 3, image reproduced by permission of Alison Betts).

The role of masks in the ritual transformation of a human being into a Master of the Animals and the struggle that this process entails is confirmed by the repeated association of the mask, the Master of Animals and/or the contest scene (Stein *forthcoming*). This distinctive combination of motifs occurs on an interesting Early Dynastic seal from the Ishtar Temple at Mari (Fig. 4.7), on the LBA seal of Sauštatar, King of Mittani, and on several other Mittanian period seals of high-ranking individuals (Fig. 4.8a–b).



Fig. 4.7 Cylinder seal. Mari, Ville VII, Ishtar Temple, cella 17; M.329. H. 7.80 cm, diam. 4.60 cm. c. 2500–2300 BCE. Musée du Louvre, AO 19809 (Parrot, 1950, pl. IV below).

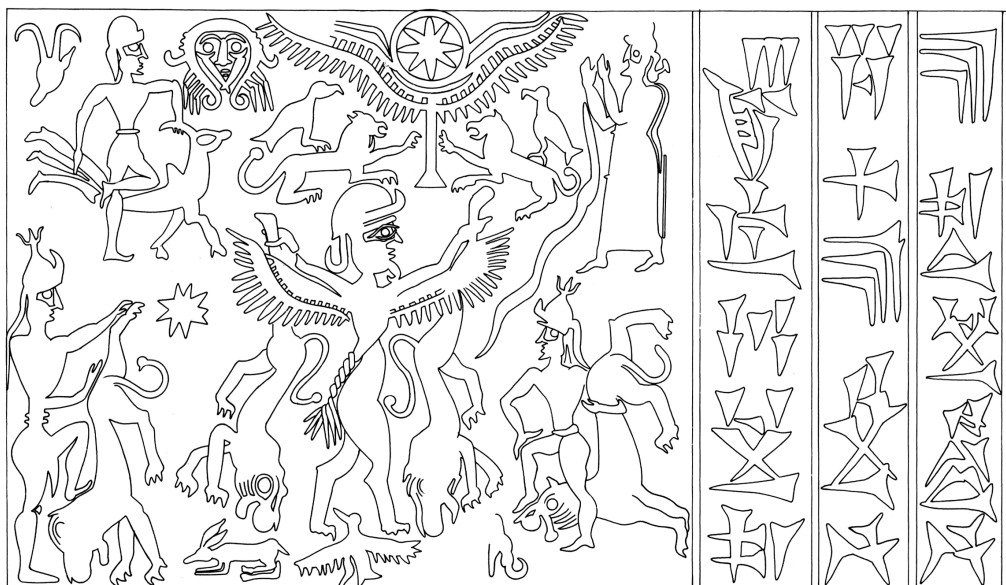


Figure 4.8a Seal of Sauštatar, king of Mittani H. 2.70 cm, diam. 1.27 cm (Stein 1993, no. 711).



Figure 4.8b Mittanian seal, rock crystal, H. 7.60, diam. 2.6 (Muscarella 1981, fig. 76. Courtesy Oscar Muscarella).

Late Bronze and Iron Age masks or depictions of people wearing them occur in the Levant and Cyprus and are often associated with temples (Garfinkel 2018, 162). In Syria, by contrast, the majority of the LBA masks are under life-size and come from houses where they seem to be connected with domestic altars (Stein 2018). In Mesopotamia there is abundant evidence for ritual apparel both in the relief decorations and in the textual records of the 1st millennium BCE, but opinions diverge over the identity of the masked and costumed performers and the nature of their performance. Although the many animal-headed human and hybrid figures could depict the transcendental state of a shaman in possession mode, Claudia Beuger (2018, 211–226) argues that with the possible exception of the lion-clad man (*nēšu-amēlu*), most of these figures relate to Mesopotamian myths. The myths may have been acted out in the mode of pretence or character acting, but, she claims, they no longer have bearing on actual ritual behaviour.

The transformative power of dress

Masks, such as those worn by shamanic figures in ritual performance during the Neolithic period, appear to have been adopted for similar purposes by the religious cultures of the Bronze and Iron Ages. If, as evidence suggests, the place of disposal was often in a remote location, then the discovery of many examples may still elude us. But we do have a continuous, if patchy, record of imagery depicting masks and masked individuals, and the findspot of miniature masks and mask-pendants in hoards, elite burials, and temples also attests to the ongoing tradition of the possession mode performance through the 2nd and possibly into the 1st millennium BCE. By this time, hunting wild game was more of a sport than a livelihood, but its

traditional association with ritual masking is preserved in the imagery. Whereas initially, at the time of the Neolithic hunting murals from Çatalhöyük, the lead actor in these rites would have been the village shaman, later allusions to these ritual performances, like the Early Dynastic seal belonging to temple personnel at Mari (Fig. 4.7), the miniature gold and faience masks of the MBA and LBA that in some cases adorned high ranking priestesses, and the LBA seal of Sauštatar, king of Mittani (Fig. 4.8a), link this imagery to the religious and political elite. By referencing a shamanic praxis that led to an encounter with the spirit world and gave access to a superior level of knowledge, these people signalled their eligibility to take on the shamanic roles of healer, ruler, and protector. This message is later epitomized by the contest between king and lion that becomes the royal insignia of the Assyrian empire (Stein *forthcoming*).

Through millennia of repetition, possession mode performance no doubt played a significant role both in shaping and reinforcing religious belief and in transmitting meaning and belief down the generations.¹³ Scenes of hunters dancing with their prey, still a popular subject in Mittanian-period glyptic (Stein 1993, 94–97), suggest that up until the end of the 2nd millennium BCE, aspects of this traditional shamanic performance still formed part of the fabric of village life. The key to its success and longevity lies in the neurohormonal effects of the aesthetic devices used during these emotionally charged events: the masquerading, chanting, dancing, singing, and drumming. The performer's transformation into an animal, ancestor, or god must have been convincing, and the acquired knowledge effective for the tradition and its associated imagery to have survived so long.

Given that masks are traditionally seen as the conduit through which a supernatural spirit enters and takes possession of another being, it doesn't require a huge leap of faith to transfer their agency from a living performer to an anthropomorphic statue. In Mesopotamia, dressing the cult image plays an integral role in the ritual transformation of man-made statues into living embodiments of divinity. According to Neo-Assyrian references, the appearance of these richly attired divine images was dazzling, and in the sense that offerings are said to be placed before the god, not the statue, their conversion was considered successful (Dick 2005, 48–51). Perhaps the rationale behind this practice lies in ancient masquerades as well.

Notes

- 1 I thank both Megan Cifarelli and the anonymous reviewer for their comments and editorial improvements.
- 2 Here I refer loosely to Merlin Donald's three stages of human cognitive evolution. He associates the second "mimetic stage" with the arrival of *Homo erectus* and the third "mythic stage" with that of modern humans (1991, 167, 169).
- 3 See Russell (2016, 28) for suggestion that the crane dance too may have been part of a shamanic ritual drawing the crane spirit into the human body.

- 4 A state of mind akin to “being in the zone” for musicians, writers, painters, and sportsmen.
- 5 This is the case in Africa and parts of Asia, as well as in Papua New Guinea (Emigh 1996, 29).
- 6 For examples at Göbelki Tepe, Çatalhöyük and Körtik Tepe see Russell and McGowan 2003; Schmidt 2006; Hodder and Meskell 2010, 53, 61; Benz and Bauer 2015, 3–4.
- 7 See also Dietrich *et al.* 2018, 13–15, Benz and Bauer 2015, 10, Cornelius 2018, 119–120.
- 8 Berlejung 2018, nos. 19 (Tell Dan), 20 (Beth Shemesh), 21 (Beth Shean). See also Peltenburg 1977, 183 for references to stone heads that resemble the miniature faience masks.
- 9 Woolley’s Isin-Larsa date for this burial is questioned by Peltenburg, who argues for a late Kassite date (1977, 182 with references).
- 10 Another instance of an old and crippled woman interred together with animal remains, this time the hornless bucranium of an aurochs, comes from an early Neolithic (Khiamian) level at Hatoula in the Shephelah region (Le Mort 1989; Lechevallier and Ronen 1994).
- 11 See also Beckman 1993 for later Hittite evidence relating to the importance of mature women in magical healing.
- 12 For example, the female figurines of the Halaf period and the terracotta figurines of the Ubaid period.
- 13 For example, during the 4th and 3rd millennia BCE, when domestic livestock supplied the majority of animal resources utilized by people across the Near East, there is evidence of steppic game hunting involving kite use. Representations of mythical (bird-headed) figures in the rock art associated with kite use in the Khabur basin, suggest that game hunting using mass-kill strategies was a communal activity with religious overtones. Not only did it “serve a social function in bringing together both sedentary and, possibly, nomadic groups, it also carried an element of social ranking and elevation that found sanction in Mesopotamian ideology” (Helms and Betts 1987, 56–61; Zeder *et al.* 2013, 122).

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Chapter 5

A proposal for interpreting the role of colour symbolism in Prepalatial Cretan body adornment

Cynthia S. Colburn

Abstract

In ancient societies, colour was connected to the environment and was, therefore, a basic unit of perception that conveyed information about the surrounding world, including religious ideology. In this essay, I suggest a method for enhancing our understanding of the potential meaning of colours that adorned the Prepalatial body in Crete. The dressed body, which acts as both boundary and connection, is capable of negotiating a multiplicity of social identities. Given the lack of textual evidence for the meanings of colour and materials in Prepalatial Crete, I present the evidence for the symbolic significance of colour in contemporary Egypt and the Near East, where textual, archaeological, and artistic evidence is abundant. Although colour symbolism is not universal, but rather is influenced by its cultural contexts, this paper proposes that knowledge of the meanings of colours in areas with trade contacts with Crete could throw light on the significance of colours in Prepalatial dress, including their potential roles in negotiating identity in the spiritual realm.

Introduction

Colour in our contemporary Western experience is often viewed as one-dimensional, a simple visual phenomenon that can be measured on a colour chart. However, in ancient societies and thought, colour was connected to material objects in the environment and therefore was a basic unit of perception that conveyed information and knowledge about the surrounding world (Bradley 2013, 128–132, 139–140). This was the case in the ancient Mediterranean, where colours and materials used to adorn the body conveyed distinct associations and meanings that were often rooted in the natural environment and spiritual domain, and thus played a role in negotiating religious identities. Given its embodied and performative nature, dress, or bodily

adornment, can powerfully communicate social identities, whether real or imagined. At the same time, the meaning of dress is also dependent on the community of the lived body and the spaces in which it performs. As an embodied subject, the dressed body – which acts as both a boundary and a point of connection – can convey a multitude of social identities that are constantly being negotiated within the context of a given society. Thus, an understanding of the symbolic significance of colour and materials that adorned the ancient body may throw light on ancient ideologies, including religious thought.¹

Colour was an important component of depictions of Cretan dress in the Bronze Age, as can be seen quite vividly in the colourful jewellery and garments worn by individuals depicted in Neopalatial frescoes. The actual colours depicted, as well as their sheen and the qualities of the materials they represent, may have communicated messages beyond their identification as exotic or luxury objects. Although the Prepalatial period lacks the elaborate frescoes of the Neopalatial period, the archaeological remains, specifically from tomb contexts, are rich and diverse in colour, and consist of jewellery and seals of a variety of colours including white (ivory, rock crystal, or perhaps silver), red (carnelian or sard), blue/green (glazed composition, or faience), and yellow (gold metal).

In this paper I propose a method for enhancing our understanding of the potential significance of colours and materials used in the bodily adornment of Prepalatial Crete, specifically c. 2500–1900 BCE. Given the lack of textual evidence from Crete, I turn to the contemporary ancient Near East and Egypt, where rich artistic, archaeological, and textual evidence for the symbolic significance of colours and materials used to adorn the body is available for the period in question (Fig. 5.1). Although no universal colour symbolism exists, as meaning in colour is based on the surrounding environment and religious beliefs (Kuehni 1980, 169), knowledge of colour symbolism in the areas with which the inhabitants of Prepalatial Crete traded and indeed from which they procured some of the materials discussed provides evidence for the potential social meanings of the colour and materials used to adorn the Prepalatial body.

This study extends earlier research in which I argue for the role of Near Eastern and Egyptian imports – including finished products, technologies, iconography, and, most importantly for this analysis, materials such as gold, silver, ivory, carnelian, chalcedony, and faience – in the construction of an elite identity in Prepalatial Crete (Colburn 2008). While this research attributed symbolic value to these materials, I focused primarily on the significance of their arrival from distant lands and their rarity in Cretan society as adding value to the works as representations of prestige and power. While power need not be divorced from religion – and as history has shown us often is not – by opening a line of inquiry into the intrinsic and religious meaning of the materials and colours used in Early Bronze Age Aegean dress, including their colour, substance, and sheen, we may ultimately glean valuable clues regarding the elusive religious beliefs of the inhabitants of Prepalatial Crete.

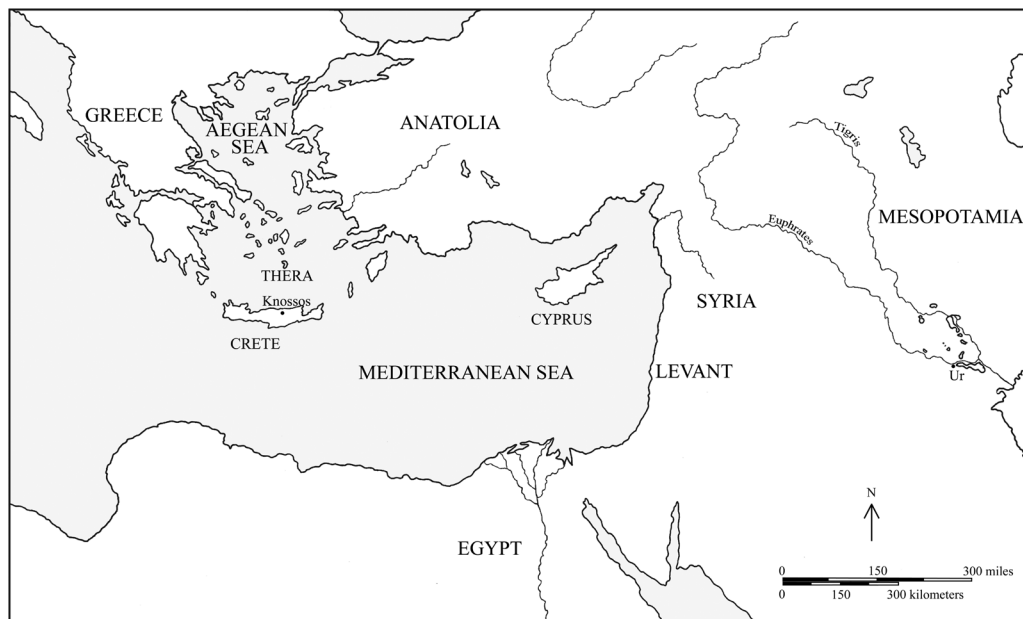


Fig. 5.1 Map of the Near East, Egypt, and the Aegean.

Colour in Prepalatial body adornment on Crete

There exist no remains of Prepalatial clothing to indicate the colours of clothing worn, nor are there figural wall paintings from this early period. The colours chosen for clothing and what appears to be jewellery on extant anthropomorphic ceramic vessels seem to result from the ceramic decorative styles of the time. We must therefore turn to the jewellery and seals excavated primarily from tombs in order to see the colours that adorned the Prepalatial body.

The colour white is well represented in the corpus of Prepalatial body adornment, although the qualities of the white materials used vary greatly. For example, hippopotamus ivory, which first appears in Crete in the Early Minoan II period and was used overwhelmingly for seals that adorned the body, is opaque, and when polished has a bright sheen. In contrast, the white chalcedony used for beads is somewhat translucent. Two large, collared globular beads of chalcedony were found in Prepalatial contexts in Tomb XIX at Mochlos (Seager 1912, 72, fig. 41, XIX.12a, b), and a chalcedony bird pendant was uncovered in Prepalatial contexts of Compartment IV of Tomb IV/V/VI at Mochlos (Seager 1912, 48, fig. 20, IV.7). Based on evidence from Egypt and Mesopotamia, one could also place the precious metal of silver in the colour category of white. While there is little evidence for silver jewellery in Prepalatial Crete, perhaps in part a result of corrosion, one notable example is an imported Syrian seal found in Compartment I of Tomb I/II/III at Mochlos (Seager 1912, 22, 111, fig. 36, I.n; Aruz 1984).

The semi-precious stones of carnelian and perhaps sard (a form of chalcedony) provide examples of the colour red in Prepalatial jewellery. Six beads identified by Seager as red carnelian were discovered in Compartment III of Tomb I/II/III and may date to the Middle Minoan IA period (Seager 1912, 39, III.k; For chronology see Soles 1992, 49–50, fig. 18). As for Prepalatial examples of sard, Xanthoudides identified a bead found in Tholos B at Koumasa as this material (Xanthoudides 1924/1971, 31). Other examples of carnelian and sard come from mixed Pre- and Protopalatial contexts.

Blue-green body adornment is exemplified in Prepalatial Crete by finds of glazed composition, or faience, beads. The earliest examples date to the Early Minoan II period and come from Compartment VI of Tomb IV/V/VI at Mochlos (Seager 1912, 55, fig. 25, VI.35). In the form of discs, these beads are typologically identical to faience beads found in 3rd-millennium contexts on Cyprus, the adjacent mainland, Egypt, and Asia Minor, and so the beads may have been imported (Peltenburg 1995, 39). Hundreds of faience beads of a variety of forms have also been found in the tholos tombs of the Mesara in mixed Pre- and Protopalatial contexts (Xanthoudides 1924/1971 31, 45, 69, 84, 124).

The colour yellow appears in Prepalatial body adornment in the form of the precious metal gold. Examples from tombs at Pyrgos and Krasi in north-central Crete date to at least the Early Minoan II period (Xanthoudides 1918, 166; Marinatos 1929, 121), and numerous Early Minoan II examples were found at Mochlos in Compartment VI of Tomb IV/V/VI and in Tomb XIX (Seager 1912). Gold jewellery continued in use in the subsequent Early Minoan III and Middle Minoan IA periods as seen at Mochlos and the Phourni necropolis at Archanes (Seager 1912; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997). Yellow-coloured objects of gold include diadems or bands, floral sprays, beads, chains, and perhaps clothing appliques.

A common attribute among all of the materials that embody these colours in Prepalatial body adornment is their sheen, or luminescence. It is also notable that the coloured jewellery and seals are often found together in clusters, sometimes in more elaborated tombs, such as at Mochlos where two of the three tombs where such body adornment is concentrated are larger and more elaborately constructed. Spaces for ritual performance are also frequently associated with the tombs where such clusters are found, such as at Mochlos, but also in some of the Mesara tholoi. Finally, many of these items of bodily adornment show evidence of wear during the lifetimes of their owners.

Colour symbolism in Egypt

Even a cursory study of colour in Egypt and Mesopotamia provides clear evidence of its importance in body adornment and its central role in religious thought and ideology. Egyptian colour words date back to the mid-3rd millennium BCE (Baines 1985, 283). Wilkinson tells us that in ancient Egypt the word for “colour”, *iwen*, can also be translated as “nature”, “being”, “character”, or “disposition”, demonstrating

its close association with substance (Wilkinson 1994, 104). Even the hieroglyphic signs used to write the word “colour” – an animal pelt or lock of human hair – demonstrate the deep connection between the concept of colour and the substances that display specific colours (Wilkinson 1994, 104). Egyptians were concerned with the nature of the materials used in their art. They valued the inner substance of an object and its symbolic significance just as much as its outward appearance, and sometimes even more (Aldred 1971, 15; Petrie 1914, 25–26 and *passim*; Wilkinson 1994, 82, 88). Colour came from nature, and so to bring colour into human bodily performance, natural elements such as stones, metals, and organic materials were needed. With respect to Egypt it is therefore essential to discuss colour in connection with the materials with which the colours are generally associated.

Although colour symbolism is complex and does not remain static through time in ancient Egypt or elsewhere (Kuehni 1980, 169), some general meanings can be gleaned by analysing the available evidence for the meaning of colour and the materials from which it sometimes derives. There was a limited palette in Egypt with six main colours, though variations existed – white, black, red, green, yellow, and blue.²

White (*hedj* and *shesep*) was associated with ritual purity by the Egyptians, and therefore white alabaster was used to produce ritual objects (Wilkinson 1994, 109). White was also associated with light, and so can relate to the metal silver, the word for which was also *hedj* (Wilkinson 1994, 109). While gold sources were abundant in ancient Egypt, sources of silver in pure form have never been discovered there. Perhaps because of this, silver garnered substantial symbolic value for the ancient Egyptians, even though it was not imperishable and easily tarnished. While the flesh of the gods was believed to be of gold, their bones were believed to be of silver. Silver was also associated with the moon and the moon god, Thoth. Statuettes of baboons, sacred to Thoth – god of writing, magic, wisdom, and the moon – were frequently crafted of silver (Wilkinson 1994, 84). Silver was also used for beads, bangles, diadems, finger-rings, amulets, and pendants (Andrews 1990, 56).

Rock crystal, a transparent colourless quartz, was also associated with the colour white, or perhaps more accurately, light or radiance. It was first used during the Predynastic period for beads and was found especially to the west of the Nile Valley between the Faiyum and Baharia Oasis, and in Sinai (Andrews 1990, 50). Hippopotamus ivory, which is of a creamy white colour, was used for bangles, finger-rings, pendants, amulets, and beads in the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods, and continued in regular use during the Old Kingdom and later. The material likely gained its potency from the strength of the hippopotamus itself. Hippo tusks were carved in relief with images of gods and creatures and used, perhaps apotropaically, as magical wands or knives (Andrews 1990, 64; Wilkinson 1994, 92).

Black (*kem*) was the colour of night, death, and the underworld, but it also symbolized resurrection and fertility (Wilkinson 1994, 109). It is likely that the black silt of the Nile, which rendered the Nile valley where it was deposited during the annual inundation so fertile, was the reason for its more positive associations (Kuehni

1980, 170; Wilkinson 1994, 109; Pastoureau 2008, 21). Osiris, god of the Nile and of the underworld and with whom the pharaoh was associated in death, was often depicted with black skin (Wilkinson 1994, 109). The colour black, however, was very rare in Egyptian jewellery.

Red (*deshet*) was associated with fire and blood among other things, and its symbolism varied dramatically, from life, regeneration, and victory on the one hand, to dangerous forces and chaos on the other (Aldred 1971, 15; Wilkinson 1994, 106; Pastoureau 2016, 20). For example, on the positive side, one sees the association of kingship with the colour red in the red crown of Lower Egypt (Kuehni 1980, 169–170). However, the dry, hot, infertile desert in Egypt was also described as being red, and its god, Seth, who was often (although not always) viewed negatively as the god of chaos known for murdering Osiris, was associated with the colour (Pastoureau 2016, 20; Wilkinson 1994, 106). This multiplicity of meanings seems to have applied to stones of red colour as well. For example, the word for red jasper, *khenmet*, derives from the verb for “to delight”, while the translucent red-brown or red-orange stone, carnelian, could have negative connotations, and at least in the Late Dynastic Period its name, “*heraset*”, meant sadness (Andrews 1990, 39).

Red jasper is found in Egypt in the Eastern Desert, but it is also depicted in New Kingdom wall painting as tribute from Punt and Nubia, suggesting that it was certainly held in high regard. It was used in the production of beads as early as the Predynastic period, and later for amulets, scarabs, and inlays (Andrews 1990, 45). Carnelian is also readily available in the Eastern Desert and Nubia, however, as with red jasper, it was still highly regarded in ancient Egypt as indicated by its inclusion with silver, lapis lazuli, and turquoise in a list of valuable New Year gifts to a vizier around 1950 BCE (Andrews 1990, 41). It was used from the Predynastic period for beads and amulets, and later finger-rings, ear ornaments, and inlay (Andrews 1990, 41).

The word for green (*wadj*) also means to flourish or be healthy, and, not surprisingly, represents growth, life, and resurrection. It is associated with the god Osiris who is often depicted as green. To do “green things” meant positive, life-producing actions as opposed to “red things”, which signified evil things (Wilkinson 1994, 108). Green stones are also associated with the afterlife, as seen in early Egyptian texts that refer to the afterlife as the “field of malachite” and a statement in the Pyramid Texts: “O you who stride out...strewing green-stone, malachite, turquoise of the stars, if you are green, the king will be green (even as) a living rush is green”.³ Malachite was used for beads before the 1st Dynasty, and it was later also used on occasion in the production of amulets as well as for inlay (Andrews 1990, 48).

Yellow (*khenet* and *kenit*) is associated with eternity and imperishability (Aldred 1971, 29; Wilkinson 1994, 108). For the Egyptians, the imperishable nature of gold alluded to eternal life. It was specifically associated with the sun, and the sun god, Re, likely due to both its golden colour and bright sheen. The Egyptians perceived the flesh of the gods descended from Re as made of gold (Aldred 1971, 15; Andrews

1990, 52). The association of gold with the sun, which rose every day, draws further parallels between gold as a material and eternal life, a key concern in Egyptian ideology (Wilkinson 1994, 83). The afterlife “body” of the Egyptian, known as the *sah*, was thought to have shining golden skin. Wilkinson tells us that this may be the reason for gilded mummy masks in Egypt, perhaps literally conveying eternal life due to its imperishability (Wilkinson 1994, 83–84). Gold was first used to make simple beads before the 1st Dynasty, but craftsmen quickly learned to produce more elaborate types of gold jewellery, including bangles, diadems, finger-rings, amulets, pendants, earrings, and more (Andrews 1990, 53).

Blue (*irtiu* and *khesbedj*), especially dark blue, represented the heavens and the primeval flood of Egypt’s creation story, and therefore was a symbol of life and rebirth. Its association with water, and specifically the Nile, also related blue to fertility and fecundity (fecundity figures were often coloured blue). On the other hand, blue could be related to the sun, as suggested by the choice of blue faience for solar-related objects, and the god Amun-Re was ultimately connected with the colour blue (Wilkinson 1994, 107–108).

Lapis lazuli, a blue stone imported from Badakhshan in northeast Afghanistan, was highly valued in ancient Egypt. It was considered to be a potent substance with beneficent powers, symbolic of the heavens because of its deep blue colour, often with golden, star-like speckles. It was in use from the Predynastic period for beads and pendants, and later for amulets, scarabs, and inlays (Pastoureau 2001, 22–23).

Glazed Composition, or faience, was very popular and common in ancient Egypt. Depending on the colour, it is sometimes seen as an imitation of lapis lazuli and even given the same name, but with the appendage of “manufactured” or “artificial” (Andrews 1990, 47). It has a sandy core with a vitreous alkaline glaze on its surface. Green and blue glazes occur from the Predynastic Period, black, white, and purple are used sporadically from the Old Kingdom onwards. Yellow and red were added during the Eighteenth Dynasty (Andrews 1990, 57–58). Egyptians referred to faience, or glazed compositions, as *tjehnet*, “that which gleams”, so beyond its colour it was also valued for its brilliance (Andrews 1990, 58). Faience was used in the Predynastic period for beads, and by the end of the Old Kingdom it was also used for amulets and pendants (Andrews 1990, 59). Similar in external appearance to faience is Egyptian Blue, which is an artificially produced frit made of a calcium-copper silicate and used for beads and amulets beginning in the Old Kingdom. In contrast to faience, the colour of products made of Egyptian Blue is consistent throughout the object (Andrews 1990, 63).

Colour symbolism in Mesopotamia

Our understanding of colour perception and symbolism in early Mesopotamia is also quite rich given the number of translated Sumerian and Akkadian texts that deal with colour terms. In Mesopotamian myth and literature, precious metals and stones often associated with these colours were endowed with magical properties by the

god Ninurta (Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, lxiii). Also notable is the epic of King Enmerkar (Kramer, 1952), ruler of Uruk in the Early Dynastic II period, in which the king seeks gold, silver, and semi-precious stones from a distant land in order to embellish shrines and temples in Eridu (Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, 1). More specific to bodily adornment is a song that describes how Inanna adorns herself with precious metals and stones in the form of rings and beads (Aruz 2003, 18). In Sumer, goldsmiths and jewellers worked directly for the temples, and much of the jewellery produced was intended to adorn statues of deities (Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, lxi–lxii, lxiv). There is also evidence that certain jewellery was associated with priestly status in Mesopotamia, as is clear from the story of Enheduanna – the daughter of Sargon of Akkad and high priestess of the Moon god, Nanna – who was expelled from Ur and “stripped of her tiara appropriate for the high priesthood” (Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, lxiii).

Mesopotamian texts include five main colour terms: white, black, red, green, and a term that denotes multicoloured or patterned (Baines 1985, 283; Sinclair 2012, 18). These are considered core colours because the words for these colours do not derive from a noun used for an object or material of a given colour. Blue is also included in this discussion because, as will be demonstrated, blue has important symbolic value in Mesopotamia even though the word for blue is taken from the word for lapis lazuli (Sinclair 2012, 18 and 21).

In ancient Mesopotamia white (*pešu*) could describe the colour “white” but was also applied to concepts such as light, brilliance, radiance, holiness, ritual purity, and sometimes even absence of colour (Sinclair 2012, 18). It was associated with silver, as in Egypt, and it was used as an epithet for the moon god Nanna and the goddess Inanna in her association with the planet Venus, further relating this colour to the brilliance or radiance associated with heavenly bodies or deities (Sinclair 2012, 18–19). This is further demonstrated by the fact that the ideogram for white came from an early representation of the rising sun (Sinclair 2012, 19).

The term for black (*salmu*) included dark hues, from dark grey and dark blue to black. It was a sombre colour, associated with the night, gloom, and shadow (Sinclair 2012, 19). It was connected with the underworld, as evidenced by its association with a Hurrian demon of darkness, which is thought to be a northern version of the Mesopotamian demon Lamaštu. Indeed, its ideogram if doubled was one of many names for the underworld (Sinclair 2012, 19). As in Egypt, black was not common in early Mesopotamian jewellery.

Red or red-brown (*sāmu*) generally had a positive association in Mesopotamia and could ward off evil or negative forces (Sinclair 2012, 20; Pastoureau 2016, 20). It was often associated with descriptions of deities, such as in the case of Inanna, who was called the “Red Lady of Heaven” due to her association with the planet Venus. Red was also associated with the rising and setting sun, and so, like white, it represented brilliance and radiance as well as colour. The colour term is also the name for the red stone carnelian (Sinclair 2012, 20; Pastoureau 2016, 20), which was commonly used for beaded jewellery, such as in the Royal Tombs of Ur from around 2600 BCE. However,

added textual modifiers such as “dark” or “bright” could change the perception of this colour. For example, bright red was used for blood, fire, storms, or rage (Sinclair 2012, 20). Notably, there exists textual evidence that carnelian was associated with women, whereas the blue stone lapis lazuli was associated with men (Winter 1999, 52).

Green to yellow (*warqu*) generally had positive connotations, representing fertility and freshness as relating to plants and beyond (Sinclair 2012, 21). The colour was also symbolic of the precious and intarnishable metal gold, which was connected to the radiance, luminosity, and brilliance of the sun (Maxwell-Hyslop 1971, lxiii). Gold was used extensively in jewellery, such as in the diadems, flower and leaf sprays, and earrings in the Royal Tombs of Ur.

The colour blue (*uqnu*) received its name from the word for the imported dark blue stone lapis lazuli, which includes small flecks of silvery pyrite and white calcite, causing it to shimmer, perhaps like stars in the night-time sky. The term was used to describe dark or deep blue, dark purple, and even black, as well as brilliance and radiance. It was associated with the holiness and opulence of gods and kings (Winter, 1999, 45; Sinclair 2012, 21). It was a very auspicious colour and more specifically material in Mesopotamia, as evidenced by texts and the archaeological record. It appears in especially high status contexts (Winter 1999, 45), as demonstrated by its prominent use in the jewellery and other objects discovered in the Royal Tombs of Ur. Textual evidence shows that lapis lazuli was believed to have healing and protective properties (Porada 1981, 7–8; Winter 1999, 50–51). The stone was also used to describe the dark and lustrous beards of men, which Irene Winter sees as emblematic of their masculinity (1999, 48).

Polychrome, or patterning (*burrumu*), was highly valued in Mesopotamia, as in combinations of white, red, and blue which perhaps allude to the need for balance between the cosmic elements of heaven, earth, and the underworld (Sinclair 2012, 23). Red and blue were also commonly found together, as in the jewellery from the Royal Tombs of Ur (Plate 5.1), and Winter suggests that combinations of red and blue show the balance between the female or earthly realm (red) with the masculine or heavenly realm (blue) (Winter 1999, 52). It has also been suggested that the colours represent the pairing of the goddess Inanna (red) with her consort Dumuzi (blue) (Sinclair 2012, 24).

Discussion

Some general observations can be made based on this brief survey of the symbolic value of colour and materials in ancient Egypt and the Near East. First, all of the materials and colours introduced here are accorded some kind of symbolic value in ancient Egyptian or Mesopotamian society based on their colour, substance, and/or shine. The symbolic meaning inherent in colour and material is often enhanced by mythological associations and perceived amuletic or medicinal properties (Wilkinson 1994, 82; Winter 1999, 49–50).

Second, based on ancient textual evidence, the quality of emanated light or shine stands out as one of the most important auspicious aesthetic attributes of physical matter in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, often representing the presence of divinity and sometimes alluding to afterlife ideology (Winter 1999, 46). An analogy to this is found in the Helladic world, where a study of the grave gifts in Late Bronze Age Mycenaean chamber and tholos tombs at Asine, Berbati, and Dendra by Carole Gillis also suggests that the most salient quality of the offerings is shine (Gillis 2016, 205).

Third, most colours and materials appear to be used by and related to both women and men in Egypt and Mesopotamia. A prominent exception in Mesopotamia discussed by Winter is the association of carnelian with women and lapis lazuli with men, as shown in an Old Babylonian bilingual incantation in which an unborn child whose sex is unknown is compared to a boat filled with carnelian (if it is a girl) or lapis (if it is a boy) (Winter 1999, 52). Also relevant is the interpretation of texts that refer

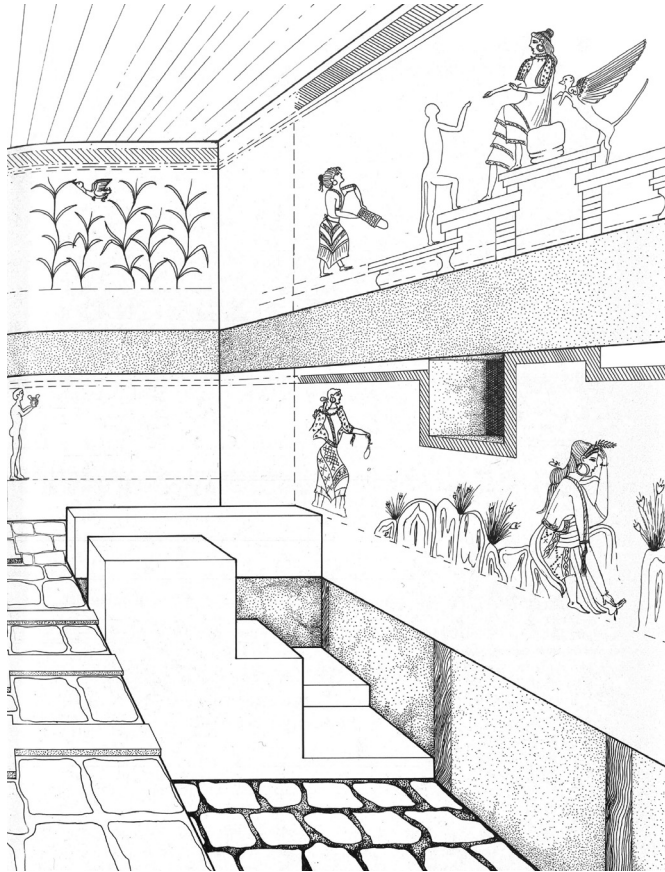


Fig. 5.2 Reconstructed drawing of Xeste 3 (image after N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion in Thera: Reconstructing a Bronze Age Society*, fig. 44).

to beards of lapis lazuli as meaning dark and lustrous, and indicative of masculinity (Winter 1999, 48). This does not mean that the colours red and blue are not found together. Rather, when combined, as is commonplace in the jewellery from the Royal Tombs of Ur, this could represent male-female union, fertility, and even afterlife, especially given the burial context in which they were discovered (Winter 1999, 52).

How might this information regarding colour symbolism in Egypt and Mesopotamia provide clues as to the potential meanings of coloured personal adornment in Prepalatial Crete? The colours white (ivory, chalcedony, silver), red (carnelian and sard), blue-green (glazed composition, or faience), and yellow (gold) are all present in items that adorned the Prepalatial body. Because they are often discovered together in the same archaeological contexts, sometimes associated with larger or more elaborated tombs with potential spaces for ritual activity nearby, it has been argued that their presence indicates an emergent elite on the eve of the construction of the first Minoan palaces (Colburn 2008). Unfortunately, since most objects made from these materials, which include gold beads, diadems (Plate 5.2), and flowers (Plate 5.3), ivory seals, and carnelian, chalcedony, and faience beads, were found in communal tombs, it is almost always impossible to associate the finds with individual bodies and therefore to discuss their role in constructing specific identities. They do, however, show clear evidence of wear and even repair, which suggests their use in life (Colburn 2008, 215–216). It might therefore be useful to review the evidence for contexts in which such ornaments might have been worn.

Late Minoan wall paintings may provide some insight into the use and, by extension, meaning of the colours and materials worn during the Prepalatial period. In wall paintings on Crete and the nearby island of Thera (modern Santorini), we see that the bodies of men, women, and even children are adorned with a variety of colours, indicating different materials. The women in the “Ladies in Blue” fresco from the Palace of Knossos on Crete wear necklaces and bracelets with blue beads, perhaps indicating faience, and red beads, perhaps suggestive of carnelian. The goddess or priestess figure in Xeste 3 at Akrotiri on Thera (Plate 5.4), who is flanked by a griffin and a blue monkey, alluding to her divinity, is shown wearing jewellery of blue, red, white, and gold, including bird pendants similar to the example in chalcedony found in Tomb IV/V/VI at Mochlos on Crete (Plate 5.5). The young women in the rest of the scene also wear a variety of coloured jewellery, and one woman, who holds a white, somewhat translucent rock crystal or perhaps chalcedony beaded necklace (Plate 5.6), appears to be walking towards another young woman shown seated on a painted rock and holding her bleeding foot. This scene is painted directly above an actual lustral basin, or *adyton*, and it appears that the necklace may be intended as an offering for the woman, or perhaps directly to the *adyton* below her (Fig. 5.2). According to Nanno Marinatos, the scene may represent a rite of passage ritual, which clearly connects the individuals wearing and holding these colourful pieces of jewellery to Minoan ideology (2003, 205–211). A pair of boxing boys from Room B1 of Building Beta at Akrotiri, their youth shown by their partially shaved heads

indicated in blue, wear blue, beaded jewellery (faience?) and what looks like a gold bracelet and earring. Wall paintings of male acrobats and the so-called “priest king” from the Palace of Knossos are also shown wearing colourful jewellery. The fact that all of these figures are from palatial or seemingly religious contexts suggests that the bodily adornment, and specifically the colours and materials represented, would have had symbolic significance to the viewers at this time. With further research, it may be possible to determine the extent to which the colours and materials of excavated Prepalatial body adornment supported its symbolic function, as was the case in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this preliminary study demonstrates a way of expanding our line of questioning regarding the potential symbolic meaning of colours and materials discovered in Prepalatial contexts in Crete, and specifically how colours and their associated materials might serve as identity markers beyond their more general associations with power. In addition to seeing materials imported to Prepalatial Crete, such as gold, silver, ivory, carnelian, chalcedony, and faience, as valuable for their rarity due to their importation from distant lands and, therefore representative of prestige, should we also see the colour, substance, and sheen of these materials as having carried auspicious religious qualities such as they did in contemporary Egypt and Mesopotamia, and at least in the case of sheen in some Late Bronze Age tombs? Was gold deposited in tombs simply in order to demonstrate the wealth and power of the individuals buried there and their access to the goods of foreign lands, or should we also see its radiance, permanence, and intarnishability – qualities that connect gold to immortality in Egypt as well as other societies (Ogdon 1990, 17–22; Hossler 1994; Wilkinson 1994, 88–89), as connecting those buried with it to divinity, perhaps as priests or priestesses, and/or symbolizing an afterlife ideology in Prepalatial Crete? Could the colours of red and blue have distinct symbolic meanings that identified individuals as belonging to certain life stages and/or a specific gender or sex? Could ivory also be an identifying marker of divinity or connection to the divine, as is clear not from Egypt or Mesopotamia, but from later Archaic and Classical chryselephantine cult statues in Greece, and arguably the Late Bronze Age chryselephantine statuette discovered in Palaikastro on Crete (Hemingway 2012, 31)?

Given the fact that identity construction could be further enhanced through ritual performance of the dressed body, the arrival and use of such colourful items as bodily adornment in the Prepalatial period was likely significant. This paper suggests that further qualitative and quantitative analysis of colours in Crete, as well as the specific contexts in which they appear, will ideally bring us closer to understanding the symbolic meaning of the colours and materials that adorned the Aegean Bronze Age body, specifically their role in negotiating a multiplicity of identities before the emergence of Minoan palaces.

Notes

- 1 For discussions and additional bibliography regarding theoretical approaches to the body and dress, especially in the past, see Cifarelli and Gawlinski 2017, 9–10; Colburn and Heyn 2008, 1–3; Joyce 2005; Lee 2015.
- 2 For a more thorough and technical discussion of colour terms in ancient Egypt, see Baines 1985, 283, who argues for four basic colour terms in Egypt – white, black, red, and green, plus the addition of a texture term indicating multicoloured. He considers blue to be secondary.
- 3 For Pyramid Text, spell 567, see Faulkner 1969 and Wilkinson 1994, 108.

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Chapter 6

Biblical regulation of tattooing in the light of ancient Near Eastern practices

Nili S. Fox

Abstract

“Dressing” the body with tattoos is a method of marking culture. Humans have been practicing this art from prehistoric to modern times as an expression of ideas about the world around them and their place within it. Frequently beliefs about the sacred are reflected through this medium. In the ancient Near East, tattooing and other types of body modifications, like piercing and branding, were utilized to display ethnicity, social status, legal standing, and personal piety. Although concrete evidence of tattooing and related body-marking rarely survives in the archaeological record, new scientific techniques have brought to light a growing number of such marks on preserved mummies. In addition, ancient Near East and biblical texts serve as a key source of data. Ancient perspectives on body-marking, especially those referenced in the Hebrew Bible, have long baffled scholars. A key goal of this study is to reexamine the contexts of the pertinent biblical passages in order to elucidate how they relate to each other, how the lone ban on tattooing (Leviticus 19:28) fits an otherwise seemingly acceptable practice, and how the Israelite perspectives can be understood within the greater cultural context of the region.

The body as a canvas

Humans have always been intrigued with the canvas of the natural body, marking the skin to “dress” its appearance. While costuming can express personal and social identity, religious and secular values, it only constitutes temporary transformation. In contrast, bodily modifications such as tattooing, piercing, scarification, cicatrisation, and branding, permanently alter the natural body. Of these, tattooing is a method that humans have employed world-wide since earliest antiquity to convey a broad range of cultural information. That information, communicated non-verbally, is transmitted by symbols, both naturalistic and abstract, which in turn represent meaningful ideas. These symbols are permanently incised into the skin and paraded around by the

wearer, often in full view. Occasionally, the tattoos are hidden from general view and exposed solely to a select audience. In either case, the tattoos are meant to speak to the viewer as well as the wearer.

In general, understanding the cognition underlying tattoo markings is challenging. Modern scholarship has advanced the study by focusing on issues relating to how the permanently marked individual is juxtaposed to the larger social group. Two commonly asked questions are: What is the symbolic significance of the marking to the wearer; and what message(s) is (are) conveyed between wearer and viewer? Answering these questions for the cultures of the ancient Near East is difficult due to limited textual data, few preserved mummies, ambiguous material remains, and of course a lack of native informants. Still, the existing evidence contributes to the formation of tentative interpretations. To illuminate biblical practices and regulations regarding tattooing, body-marking must be examined within the cultural context of the greater ancient Near East.

Tattooing in ancient Egypt

The richest finds attesting to tattooing in early antiquity derive from Egypt, where the practice can be traced to the 4th millennium BCE.¹ Past scholarly conjecture that figurines sporting geometric designs or images of animals (Fig. 6.1) mirror actual tattoos was only recently confirmed when infrared photography revealed tattoos on two Egyptian Predynastic mummies (latter 4th millennium), a male and a female, housed in the British Museum. The female mummy sports several abstract tattoo designs, including four small S-shapes on her right shoulder. Tattoos on the male mummy are located on his right upper arm and show images of horned animals: sheep and wild cattle, both common iconographic elements of the period (Friedman 2018, 118–121, figs 1–2). This latest find buttresses the identification of a microlith stuck in a wooden stick discovered in a 1st Dynasty (early 3rd millennium) royal tomb at Abydos (Fig. 6.2) (Petrie 1901, 24, pl. 6:15) and a “toolkit” of bone awls and pigment remains in a grave of a Predynastic (mid-4th millennium) middle-aged woman at Hierakonpolis as tattooing equipment (Friedman 2017, 21–22).

Specific cultural contexts for Egyptian tattooing practices become evident from Middle Kingdom (MK) (20th–17th century) tomb finds. One mummy with preserved tattoos, named Amunet (Imn.t), was a priestess of Hathor at Thebes. She bears the epithet “King’s Favorite”. Amunet is tattooed with a series of dots and dashes on her arms, thighs, and lower abdomen (Keimer 1948, 8–13, figs 8, 10, 11). Two other mummies sporting diamond pattern tattoos on their arms and chests and cicatrix marks across their lower abdomens were identified as dancers (Fig. 6.3a) (Keimer 1948, 13–15, pls VI–IX). This tattoo style is also typical on Nubian mummies (Bianchi 1988, 23–24), suggesting a shared cultural tradition. Sets of needles with folded points dated to the MK have been tentatively identified as tattooing instruments used to execute such marks (Tassie 2016, 97–99).

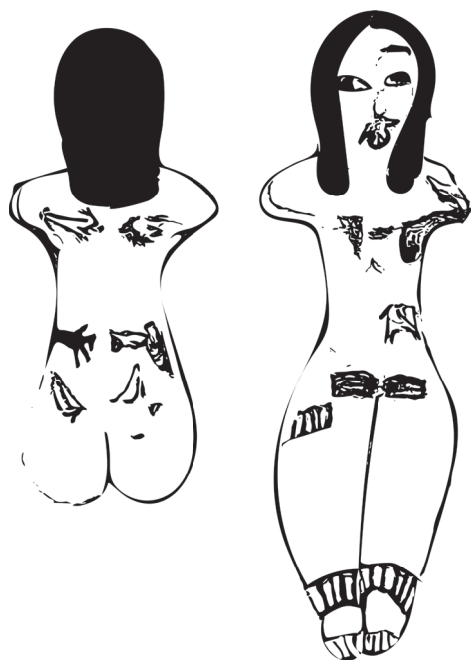


Fig. 6.1 Female, clay figurine. Predynastic, 4th millennium. Metropolitan Museum of Art (after Keimer 1948, fig. 1, drawing by Naomi Zinn).



Fig. 6.2 Flint in a wooden handle. Abydos. 1st Dynasty (after Petrie 1901, pl. 6:15, drawing by Naomi Zinn).

Notably, designs and patterns similar to the MK tattoos appear on small female tomb figurines known as “companions of the dead”. One such MK faience figurine is marked with black diamond patterns identical to those of the dancer mummies. She wears a girdle of shells common to dancers and her pubic area shows cicatrix-like marks (Fig. 6.3b) (Keimer 1948, pl. XII:2). Apparently, these abstract

tattoo designs were popular among women who served as entertainers and cult functionaries. Robert Bianchi (1988, 22–23) posits erotic significance to the tattoos, in part because of Amunet’s connection with Hathor, whose roles included goddess of love. Noticeably, in the case of these mummies, several of the tattoos are located on the body in regions only visible when the wearer is scantily clothed or naked.

More data is available from New Kingdom (NK) Egypt (mid-16th–11th century). A female musician depicted on a faience bowl bears on her thigh an image in silhouette of the deity Bes (Fig. 6.4) (Keimer 1948, 41, pl. XXI:2). Similarly, a female lute player on a fresco in a residence at Deir el-Medineh displays a Bes image on her thigh (Keimer 1948, pl. XX).² The discovery of NK and later tattooed mummies strengthens the identification of the decorated figures in art-form as representative of tattooed humans. For example, a NK female mummy recently discovered at Deir el-Medineh displays tattoos with comparable religious motifs. The mummy is heavily tattooed on her arms, shoulders, neck, and back, areas of the body easily visible to any viewer. A single tattoo of a pair of lotus blossoms is somewhat hidden on her lower back. Most interesting are the rows of tattoos on her neck (Fig. 6.5): the top row pictures a *wadjet* eye (a protective force) flanked by two baboons (greeters of the sun); the bottom

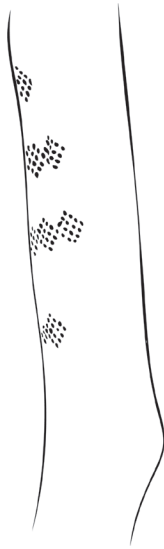


Fig. 6.3a Arm, tattooed female mummy. Deir el-Bahri, Eleventh Dynasty. Metropolitan Museum of Art (after Keimer 1948, pl. VI, drawing by Naomi Zinn).

row pictures two *nefer* signs (representing goodness) flanked by a pair of *wadjet* eyes. These symbols, including the lotus blossoms, are common on amulets, in magical spells, and in votive contexts associated with the goddess Hathor (Austin and Gobeil 2016, 23–36, 46, fig. 3).

In contrast to the enigmatic nature of abstract designs, identifiable images of deities such as Bes or symbols associated with Hathor undoubtedly bear religious significance. In the case of Bes, who held multiple and diverse roles – as a protective deity in childbirth and of young children, but also roles widely associated with eroticism – meaning is not always apparent. Possibly, when wearers functioned as dancers or musicians, the Bes tattoo expressed the god's erotic role. Or, as Geoffrey Tassie posits (2003, 94–96), Bes' concern with fertility and protection of mother and child does not exclude focus on sexuality. In the case of the tattooed mummy, cultic and magical apotropaic symbols associated with Hathor suggest that the woman may have served in her community as a healer and/or a priestess (Austin and Gobeil 2016, 36).³

Regrettably, textual evidence of Egyptian tattooing rituals, crucial for identifying cultural meaning, is lacking from MK or NK sources. However, two papyri of hymns



Fig. 6.3b Female, clay figurine. Middle Kingdom, c. 2000. Musée du Louvre (after Keimer 1948, pl. XII:2, drawing by Naomi Zinn).



Fig. 6.4 Painting, female musician with Bes image. Faience bowl, Eighteenth/Nineteenth Dynasty. Leiden Rijksmuseum (after Keimer 1948, pl. XXI:2, drawing by Naomi Zinn).

from the Ptolemaic period (late 4th century) do reference the use of body marking in religious practices: the “Songs of Isis and Nephthys” and the “Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys” (Faulkner 1936, 121–140; Lichtheim 1980, 116–121). The Songs were sung at the celebration of the Osirian mysteries; the Lamentations were part of a funerary service mentioned in a version of the Book of the Dead. As part of these rituals, two virgin priestesses with the names of the goddesses Isis and Nephthys

“inscribed” (Egyptian *mtn*) on their arms chanted the hymns petitioning for the rising of the underworld god Osiris (Faulkner 1933, 1 l.4). The inscribed goddess names, likely tattoos, seem to have enabled the priestesses to embody the deities. While the ritual in these later texts does not fully elucidate the function of earlier tattoos, it does offer insights on beliefs surrounding the potency of such body marks.

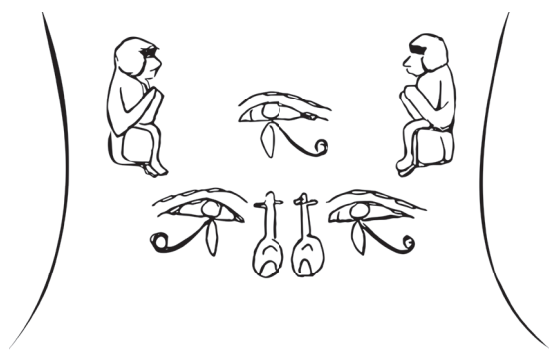


Fig. 6.5 Tattooed female mummy. Deir el-Medineh, Nineteenth–Twentieth Dynasty (After Austin and Gobeil 2016, fig. 3. © IAFÖ, drawing by Naomi Zinn).

Based on the evidence then, it appears that tattoos served various functions in ancient Egypt.

Depending on the symbolic nature of the designs, they could convey curative, magical, and religious messages, or a combination thereof.⁴ Even a single tattoo could be multi-vocal in its meaning, as in the case of the Bes image. A key indicator is the location of the tattoo on the human body. Was the tattooed image meant to be publicly viewed or was it hidden in areas generally covered by clothing and exposed only when the wearer was scantily clothed or naked? Tattooed priestesses, dancers, and musicians could have fit that profile, perhaps simultaneously conveying erotic messages to viewers.

An important consideration is how tattooing related to gender. Among Egyptians, tattooing was far more prevalent on females than males. To date, secure evidence

of tattooed Egyptian males is attested solely by the single Predynastic case. In later Dynastic periods, tattoo-type marks appear on images of foreign males only, most notably on Libyan chiefs. Egyptian artists, who distinguished ethnicity by physical features and dress, depict Libyans in native dress indicative of their tribes (O'Connor 1990, 45–66); descriptions by later classical writers confirm details in the artistic renditions (Bates 1970, 118–141). The Libyans' unique body markings are striking on a painting from the tomb of Pharaoh Seti I (c. 1300) depicting the four "races" of humanity: Egyptian, Asiatic, Nubian, and Libyan.⁵ The Libyans sport a variety of designs on their legs and arms that appear to be tattoos (Fig. 6.6) (Keimer 1948, pl. XXVII). One design, which features a rectangle with antenna-like ends, is the symbol and hieroglyph of the Libyan-Egyptian goddess Neith (Watterson 1984, 176–178). Those so "dressed" were undoubtedly her devotees.

Another function of body marking in Egypt was to identify foreign captives. On a relief from Medinet Habu (Breasted 1930, pl. 42) Sea People prisoners are shown being marked by Egyptian scribes carrying a writing kit and a stylus-type instrument resembling a tattooing needle or knife. The practice of marking prisoners, either with the name of the Pharaoh or an Egyptian deity, is also attested in NK texts. In a text



Fig. 6.6 Painting, tattooed Libyan. Tomb of Seti I, Valley of the Kings, Nineteenth Dynasty (after Keimer 1948, pl. XXVII, drawing by Naomi Zinn).

from Abu Simbel Rameses II claims to have “branded” captives from Hatti with the name of the god Ptah (Breasted 1906, #414); Rameses III states that he “branded” captured Libyans, including women and children, with his own name (Pap. Harris I, 77:4–6 in Bakir 1952, 110–112). Egyptologists generally assume that these texts refer to branding rather than tattooing, based on the verb *3bw* written with a firebrand hieroglyphic determinative (Eggebrecht 1975, 1:850–852; Faulkner 1991, 2; Hannig 1995, 5). Notably, however, the nominal form of *3bw*, *3bt*, appears with a determinative descriptive of tattooing – a writing kit, and another descriptive of branding – a metal stamp typical in marking cattle (Davies 1923, pl. 32). The dual determinatives obscure any potential identification of the type of marking, possibly because the meaning of the term *3bw/t* was broadly conceived as inclusive of both branding and tattooing.

Similar tattooing and/or branding examples appear on slaves in Elephantine texts from the Persian period (late 5th century). An Aramaic document recording the apportionment of slaves mentions one named Petosiri who is marked on his right hand with a *šnyt*, a tattoo or brand, reading “(belonging) to Mibtahiah”. Two additional marks, the letter *yod* and the number one, appear next to the slave owner’s name (Kraeling 1953, pl. 5:3, 183; Porten and Yardeni 1986, B2:11). The significance of the number one is elusive but the *yod* may have indicated that Petosiri belonged to Jews, as suggested by his mistress’ name which features a Yahwistic suffix.

Tattooing in Mesopotamia and the Levant

Evidence of body marking practices in Mesopotamia in prehistoric periods is based on assumptions that decorated figurines mirror marked humans. For example, two clay female figurines from Ur of the Ubaid “lizard” type (mid-5th millennium) show painted dots, lines, and bands on one and incised marks on the other (Collon 1995, 46, fig. 25). The lack of mummies from the region prevents any

secure identification of actual body-marking. Valuable data, however, is derived from later Akkadian texts. Texts from Babylonia dated to the Middle Babylonian (MB) and Neo-Babylonian (NB) periods (mid-2nd–mid-1st millennium), indicate that branding was the primary method of body marking, usually employed to identify persons bound in servitude to human masters. Such persons bore their owner’s sign or name. The Akkadian

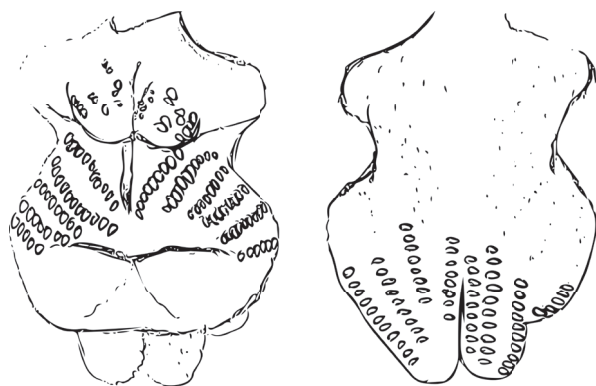


Fig. 6.7 Female, clay figurine. 'Ain Ghazal, Jordan, c. 7000 (after Rollefson and Simmons 1985, fig. 3, drawing by Naomi Zinn).

expression *šindu/šimtu parzilli*, “iron stamp” (CAD Š/3, 9–11; P, 214; Dandamaev 1984, 232, 488), descriptive of the instrument used, identifies the marking technique as branding. In other cases the process is described as “inscribing”, *šaṭāru* (CAD Š/2, 231), which more likely refers to tattooing incised with needles or knives (Mendelsohn 1949, 44–47).

Marking temple servants with the deity’s symbol was a common practice as well. One such category of servants was the *širkātu* of the NB and Persian periods (latter half 1st millennium), a class of male and female temple officials dedicated to the service of a specific deity. These persons held a significantly higher status than household slaves, including the right to participate in commercial activities, own property and even slaves (YBT VII 114, 71–71 in Dougherty 1923, 13–32). Some were children dedicated by a parent, as in the example of a desperate widow who marked her two young sons with Ishtar’s star (*kakkabu*) for a lifetime of *širkātu* service to the goddess (REN 154 in Dougherty 1923, 33). The mark borne by these temple servants designated their special relationship with their patron deity (Fox 2011, 267–271).

As in Mesopotamia, any potential evidence of tattooing in the Levantine region in prehistoric periods is limited to design marks on figurines. A female clay figurine from southern Anatolia (c. 5000) shows lines and dots on her shoulders and abdomen which could indicate tattooing (Collon 1995, 44, fig. 23); two female clay figurines from the village of ‘Ain Ghazal, Jordan (c. 7000) bear marks identified as rocker-stamped stippled tattoos (Fig. 6.7) (Rollefson and Simmons 1985, 40–42, figs 3–4). To date, secure evidence, as that based on marked mummies, is totally lacking from this region from the prehistoric through the Persian period.

The biblical stand on Israelite tattooing

The Hebrew Bible mentions various types of body modification. One common form, involving ear or nose piercing, is considered multi-vocal due to its range of meanings. Biblical examples indicate that such piercings were employed to mark the wearer’s legal status, often as a permanent deprecatory symbol. Placed conspicuously on the victim’s face or ears, the symbol was easily visible to the outside world. Laws in the legal collections of Exodus and Deuteronomy describe the practice of marking a lifelong slave by piercing/mutilating his/her ear (Exodus 21:5–6 men; Deuteronomy 15:16–17 men and women). An oracle from Isaiah cites a different context, namely, the Assyrian practice of dragging an enemy ruler by a nose hook and bit. The prophet Isaiah predicts that God will engage that method to punish Israel’s enemy Sennacherib king of Assyria (2 Kings 19:28; Isaiah 37:29). But piercing the ears or nose was also decorative, employed by men and women to dress their body with ornaments. Archaeological finds of gold rings created for pierced ears or noses, such as those uncovered in a Jerusalem tomb at Ketef Hinnom dated to the 7th–6th century (King and Stager 2001, 278, fig. III.157) attest to their popularity. Earrings, nose rings, and other jewellery items were also worn to showcase a person’s newly acquired status, as that of a bride (Ezekiel 16:12). Interestingly, earrings, more than other jewellery

items, seem to have held religious significance. For example, at Sinai Aaron collected gold earrings from Israelites for the purpose of creating a golden calf (Exodus 32:2–4). Similarly, each of Gideon’s men donated a gold earring from his booty to fashion an ephod cult object (Judges 8:24–27).

Key to the present investigation are the biblical texts that describe body modifications indicative of tattooing: Genesis 4:15; Leviticus 19:28; Numbers 6:27; Isaiah 44:5; 49:16 and Ezekiel 9:4.⁶ It is curious that among these, only one legal ordinance (Leviticus 19:28) appears to prohibit the practice, while the others offer positive views within the context they describe. To understand the biblical view(s) on tattooing and related body marking each text is examined below to elucidate the following: Can the example refer to tattooing? And, if so, how does the context illuminate the practice within its cultural milieu? If, however, the reference is best understood as figurative, might it still allude to actual practices? Why does the Levitical law regulate tattoo-type body marking? Finally, how can insights on tattooing from non-Israelite cultures be utilized to elucidate the biblical examples?

Genesis 4:15 – the mark of Cain: “And the Lord put (wayāsem) a mark/sign (’ôt) on Cain so that anyone who finds him not kill him”

What was the mark of Cain? While recognizing the literary character of the story of Cain and Abel, the reference to body marking likely mirrors a familiar practice. Whatever the nature of the mark and however it was affected, two things are evident: it was permanent, thus qualifying as a tattoo, cicatrix, or brand, and it served to protect Cain from avengers and other dangerous persons. Explanations of the mark’s function abound. Early anthropologists, like James Frazer (1923, 33–45), followed a cross-cultural approach, understanding the mark of Cain as reminiscent of a custom which banished manslaughterers from their communities because they presented danger to the group emanating from the blood of the deceased. Frazer theorized that Cain considered himself disguised by the mark.

While Frazer’s comparative ethnographic example is informative, it seems more productive to derive the form and function of Cain’s mark from the biblical account itself. First, the Genesis story implies that the mark on Cain’s forehead was unique to Cain, placed there by God as a distinguishing feature. Claus Westermann (1984, 308–314) argues that the mark is inextricably tied to the punishment, protecting Cain from death but insuring that he would wander excommunicated from his community all his natural life. Surprisingly, Westermann overlooks the fact that God marked Cain only after he (Cain) expressed fear for his life: “You banished me this day from the soil and from before you I will be hidden” (4:14). Cain’s statement reveals the writer’s belief that as an exiled wanderer Cain was godless, banished from Yahweh’s cult and thereby unprotected (Rabinowitz 1961, 56–57; Von Rad 1953, 89). Thus, Cain’s mark, placed on him by God, primarily functioned as a divine protective agent for one in exile.

Isaiah 44:5 – the mark of a Yahweh devotee

This passage in Deutero-Isaiah (44:1–5) is part of the prophet’s message of comfort to the exilic community in Babylon. It reiterates God’s covenantal allegiance to Jacob/Israel, and in turn, the people’s renewed fealty to Yahweh. The faithful affirm their allegiance by vocalizing it: “I am Yahweh’s”; by calling out (or being called, *yiqqārē*) in the name of Jacob⁷ thereby affirming their ethnic identity; by inscribing on their hand *lyhwh*, “belonging to Yahweh”; and by adopting the name Israel as an honorific title.⁸

What remains unclear from the Isaiah reference is whether “marking” in the text was meant to be interpreted literally or metaphorically, as perhaps “a spiritual sign” (Talmon 1984, 10–11). In support of a literal interpretation of Isaiah 44:5 is the comparable ancient Near East practice of inscribing a god/goddess name on the worshipper. Thereby, the sign of fealty and identity exhibited by the Judeans would affirm their continued faith in Yahweh. As a tattooed inscription on a person’s hand it would also bespeak permanence. Possible related signs on the arm and forehead appear in the Bible as *ṭōṭāpōt* (Exodus 13:16; Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18). Ruth Fagen (1992, 369) notes that the *ṭōṭāpōt* may be an offshoot of ancient Near East tattooing or branding practices undertaken as prophylactic measures. Thus, even seemingly figurative depictions could have been borrowed from actual customs. Notably, this biblical text reflects a positive attitude to body marking in an exilic context where devotion to one’s deity in exchange for divine protection is critical for group survival.

Isaiah 49:16 – Israel/Zion engraved on God’s hands

Like Isaiah 44:5, Isaiah 49:16 is a message of comfort to the exiled Judeans in Babylon. In this passage, the prophet assures Zion, and by extension her people, that just as a mother does not forsake her babe (49:14–15), God has not abandoned his people. As proof, Yahweh “engraves” a symbol of Jerusalem rebuilt on his palms. The term *haqqōṭīk*, “I have engraved you”, seems to apply to the people as well as the city.⁹ This act underscores the people’s eternal union with God, who as their saviour secures the walls of Jerusalem.

Juxtaposed to the faithful inscribing the name Yahweh on their hands (Isaiah 44:5), Yahweh engraving his palms (49:16) is a curious notion. While corporeal marking of the deity in Isaiah is most perplexing in terms of rendering a literal or figurative understanding, we cannot discount the significance that such a symbol would have engendered in the minds of Judeans. Just as persons of faith bore visible marks testifying to a special relationship with their deities, it seems reasonable that a deity could engrave himself/herself with his/her chosen people and holy city. The engraving on Yahweh’s palms would then testify to the eternal covenant between Israel and God, serving as a sign of his constancy and the hope of restoration for those living in exile.¹⁰



Fig. 6.8 Female, incised ivory. Arslan Tash, 8th century (after Keel 1981, fig. 16, drawing by Naomi Zinn).

Ezekiel 9:4 – the mark of the righteous

In this chapter the prophet Ezekiel envisions a scene of the imminent Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. God orders six executioners to slaughter the city's guilty Judeans. One of the six, clothed in linen, perhaps a priest or prophet, is girded as a scribe with a writing kit, *qeset* (Egyptian *gsty*). He is instructed to mark the forehead of each righteous person with a *tav*, the last letter of the alphabet shaped as an X in paleo-Hebrew. Those so marked are to be spared. The purpose of the mark, then, is to distinguish pious individuals; the X placed on their forehead functions as an identifying sign, either temporarily or permanently depending on the nature of the mark.

Notably, in Iron Age Israel (1st millennium) an X, or the letter *tav*, was used to mark ownership on objects. Daniel Block (1997, 307) proposes that in Ezekiel 9.4 it served to mark the righteous *lyhwh* “belonging to Yahweh”, as in Isaiah 44.5. Othmar Keel posits that the *tav* mark in Ezekiel bears resemblance to depictions of small plaque *tôṭāpōt*-like pendants attached to the forehead of cult figurines (1981, 208). Of special interest is the image of a woman in the window, a well-known motif, incised on an ivory from Arslan Tash (Keel 1981, 202, figs 16–17). She wears a plaque marked with an X/*tav*(?) on her headdress (Fig. 6.8).¹¹ Perhaps on figures too, this mark served as an apotropaic symbol. In any case, the Ezekiel text again underscores the role of body marking in an exilic context.

Numbers 6:27 – “placing/writing” God’s name on the Israelites

Numbers 6:24–26 records the priestly blessing formula recited over the Israelites, a rite assigned exclusively to priests. Verse 27, which follows the words of the blessing, seems to focus on the enactment of the blessing. It calls for the priests *wēsāmû*, “to place” God’s name upon the Israelites so that God may bless them. The verbal root *sym*, which is also used for marking Cain (Genesis 4:15), has a semantic range broadly meaning “place” or more specifically “inscribe”. But as an act in the ritual of blessing, it seems to lack clarity. How was God’s name transferred to the Israelites? Was it by an actual “inscribed” physical mark or simply via the priest’s recitation of the blessing which “linked” God’s name to the people?¹²

In a recent study, Jeffrey Tigay (2017, 17–26) explores a comparative case: the usage of the root *sym* as it relates to a deity or person “placing” or “inscribing” their name in a temple or on a monument. In numerous examples of the Hebrew term and its cognates in Semitic inscriptions *sym* indeed signifies “write” or “incise”. The challenge Tigay encounters is whether the phrase: “to place God’s name” at a chosen location, such as the Jerusalem Temple (*i.e.* Deuteronomy 12:5; I Kings 9:3), should be understood literally or figuratively. Interpreting “placing God’s name on the Israelites” in Numbers 6:27 raises similar problems. Meir Bar-İlan (1989, 19–21) and Sandra Jacobs (2014a, 1–16), whose studies focus on the sense of *sym* in the priestly blessing, opt for a literal interpretation. They argue that God’s name is in fact written upon the Israelites, either directly on the skin or on an object worn on the body like the amulets inscribed with Yahweh’s blessing from Ketef Hinnom. Jacob Milgrom (1990, 52) concurs but limits his interpretation to God’s name attached via amulets.

Although it may seem impractical for priests to have physically marked individual Israelites after blessing the congregation, the process can be compared to Catholic priests marking congregants on the forehead with ashes shaped as a cross on Ash Wednesday. Perhaps Israelites were marked with God’s name by a single letter, such as a *yod* for *yhwh*. While it remains indeterminable how God’s name was “placed” on Israelites, ancient Near East data on body-marking suggests that minimally the priestly action was framed as reminiscent of an actual practice. Even if it were a figurative gesture, the “placing” or “inscribing” of God’s name was affected by priests who regulated the ritual for Israelites.

Leviticus 19:28 – regulation of tattooing

Leviticus 19:28 records the only explicit prohibition against or regulation of the practice of tattooing in the Bible: “Incisions/gashes for the dead you will not make in your flesh nor incised marks on yourselves”. As an apparent prohibition unique in the ancient Near East to Israel it requires clarification. First, the expression *kētōbet qa’āqa’*, translated “incised marks”, needs to be defined. The term *kētōbet* is clear, referring to writing often accomplished by incising on stone or other hard substance (*e.g.* Exodus 32:15–16; Deuteronomy 9:10). The etymology of *qa’āqa’*, a hapax, is uncertain (Reider 1952, 113), though based on the context and in tandem with *kētōbet* it undoubtedly refers to some type of incised writing on the body.

So how should we understand the regulation of tattooing? First and foremost, an explication of the law’s placement in the biblical text directly following a ban on funerary rites involving self-mutilation (Leviticus 19:28a) is called for. While the sequence may initially suggest an ideological relationship between tattooing and bodily gashing, that connection must be discounted (Milgrom 2000, 1694–1695; Huehnergard and Liebowitz 2013, 62–70). As John Huehnergard and Harold Liebowitz have shown, no evidence exists that ancient Near East mourning practices were ever associated with tattooing. One feature that ties verse 28b with the preceding ban in verse 28a is that both gashing and tattooing involve cutting the skin (Olyan 2004,

114). If we expand on the latter connection to include the regulation of shaving head hair in verse 27, we note that all three practices involve cutting, progressing from temporary to permanent bodily alteration. As such, shaving the hair, gashing the skin, and incising a tattoo, make visible an individual's special status or identity, either temporarily or for a lifetime.

One obstacle to understanding this priestly regulation is determining its underlying rationale. A common argument is that tattoos, like other bodily alteration such as piercings, functioned exclusively as symbols of slavery verifying property ownership (Huehnergard and Liebowitz 2013, 69–74; Jacobs 2014b, 190–225; Milgrom 2000, 1694–1695; 2001, 2214). As such, any law abolishing slavery among Israelites (Leviticus 25:39–46) would have banned the marks of slavery. Although this explanation seems logical, it falls short because it attributes only a single function to body-marking, thus ignoring its potential multi-vocal sense. As evident from cases cited in Genesis, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Numbers, tattoos and similar marks placed on Yahweh devotees signaled divine favour, a status not equivalent to bondage of one human to another. Examples cited from Egypt and Mesopotamia evince comparable functions.

Finally, the scope of the Levitical law needs to be addressed. Since it fails to specify parameters for what appears to be a prohibition against tattooing one could assume that it is all inclusive, but then we are again left with biblical examples reflecting opposing views. Notably, all biblical texts expressing positive views of the practice maintain that the marks were executed by divine authority, either by Yahweh or his functionaries (Genesis 4:15; Isaiah 44:5; 49:16; Ezekiel 9:4; and Numbers 6:27). In addition, the setting of four of these texts is exilic (Numbers 6:27 is unspecified) where tattoos and related marks highlight the name or sign of Israel's deity and identify wearers as Yahweh devotees who are under his protection. I suggest, then, that the so-called priestly ban on tattooing (Leviticus 19:28) sought to control the practice by prohibiting it to Israelites under all other circumstances.

Conclusion

A survey of ancient Near East examples of tattooing in their cultural contexts has revealed multiple functions of body-marking. Egyptian data, by far the most informative, indicate that the subjects of tattoo images are often infused with religious significance. The images represented can be in the form of a particular deity, as those of Bes and Neith, or depicted as symbols associated with a divinity, as those of Hathor. Notably, the cultural value of even a single image can be multi-vocal, reflecting a complex of meanings. Elucidating the tattoo's function requires information about the wearer, the location of the mark on her/his body, and the role(s) of the subject portrayed in the image. Similarly, marks of servitude, commonly utilized throughout the ancient Near East, should be interpreted through multiple lenses.

When viewed in the light of comparable ancient Near East practices, biblical references to body-marking identifiable as tattoos appear to reflect an Israelite reality.

Although no certitude exists to dictate a literal rather than figurative interpretation of the examples evinced in Genesis 4:15, Isaiah 44:5; 49:16, Ezekiel 9:4, and Numbers 6:27, the Levitical regulation (Leviticus 19:28) is a strong indicator that these practices must have existed and were regarded positively under certain circumstances. Key to understanding the biblical regulation of tattooing is recognition of its underlying agenda. That agenda, advanced by proponents of biblical legislation grounded in priestly ideology, sought to promote holiness among all Israelites. By controlling dress-related practices like tattooing, they prevented the crossing of religious boundaries as defined by their precepts.

Notes

- 1 All dates in this paper are BCE.
- 2 Some Egyptologists have identified engravings in the form of raised cartouches, inscriptions, or images on sculpted human figures from the NK as tattoos. More current opinion rightly interprets the engravings as an artistic convention utilizing available space to write on sculpture (Bianchi 1988, 26–27; Freed *et al.* 1999, figs 4–5; Keimer 1948, 47–51; Lepsius 1972, pl. III: 106, 109).
- 3 In early studies, Egyptologists categorized the tattooed women of the MK and NK as prostitutes or entertainers of low status. There is no evidence, however, that women who served as concubines to royals and high officials or as palace dancers and musicians, were considered low class. Surely the priestess Amunet, who was buried within the temple precinct, would not have fit that category (Keimer 1948, 96–103; Lineberry 2007, 2; Winlock 1947, 43).
- 4 Another suggestion, by Lineberry (2007, 2), focuses on the tattoo location. She argues that since tattooed regions on the body – abdomen, thighs, and breasts – are areas affected by pregnancy, the marks functioned as a protective “net”. No data, however, supports this hypothesis.
- 5 The tomb of Seti I contains scenes from the Book of Gates showing the four human races sharing the afterlife (Hornung 1991, 18). Hornung notes: “After the cosmopolitanism of the Amarna Age, the Egyptians were apparently ready to accept foreign people in the netherworld with them.”
- 6 References to temporary body marking such as gashes (Deuteronomy 14:1) are not included in this study. Demsky’s inclusion of Job 37:7 as evidence of tattooing (2006, 240) is omitted due to its obscure meaning.
- 7 Some commentators assume a reference to proselytes, but that overlooks the focus of the text, Judean exiles who are apt to assimilate but choose to reaffirm their Israelite ethnic and religious identity (Blenkinsopp 2000, 234; Elliger 1978, 391–392).
- 8 Compare Isaiah 45:4 for the honorific meaning of the verbal root *knh*.
- 9 Blenkinsopp (2000, 311) dismisses this possibility maintaining that the engraving on the deity is the blueprint of Jerusalem’s new city walls, comparable to the outline of Lagash on Gudea’s lap. One can, however, argue that the verb *haqqōtīk* (with feminine pronominal suffix) applies to Israel as well, the focus of the redemption. Goldingay and Payne consider the possibility that the palms of Israelites were engraved (2007, 186–187).
- 10 Note that in Ezekiel 4:1 a plan of the city of Jerusalem is incised on a brick. In that case it is marked for destruction – the city crumbling as easily as a brick.
- 11 Small plaque-like insignia are also found on the forehead of masks, as the lion’s head on a terracotta mask from Tharros, which could be a protective symbol or image of strength (Brown 1992, 18).
- 12 The JPS Tanakh translates “link”.

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Chapter 7

Weapons and weaving instruments as symbols of gender in the ancient Near East

Sophus Helle

Abstract

A consistent association runs through the cultures of the ancient Near East: weapons are used by men and weaving instruments by women. The two sets of items were not only employed as practical instruments in warfare and textile labour respectively, but were also worn on the body as symbolic items of dress used to construct the wearer's gendered identity. However, the representation of gender through cultural symbols in turn allowed for gender to be actively manipulated. Gender became as mobile as the items that symbolized it. In ritual contexts, weapons and weaving instruments were used to enhance and impede masculinity, by presenting or removing the apposite symbols, and further, the symbols could be flipped, redeployed, or intertwined in a number of surprising ways. The essay emphasizes the complexity that lies beneath the deceptively simple equation of weapons with men and weaving with women, arguing that in ancient Near Eastern literature, weapons and weaving instruments were employed both to reinforce and to disturb normative constructions of gender.¹

Introduction

In the cultures of the ancient Near East, two sets of symbols were consistently used to symbolize gender. Weaving instruments such as spindles, shuttles, and pins were associated with women, while weapons such as swords, bows, and axes were associated with men. Already fifty years ago, Harry Hoffner (1966) noted the remarkable recurrence of this pattern across Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Israelite, and Canaanite cultures. The symbolic pair seems to have had an almost universal appeal in the ancient world, serving as a solid cross-cultural foundation for the representation of gender. Regardless of language, period, or region, in the ancient Near East the key symbols of gender seem to have remained more or less stable. However, in this essay I

will explore some of the complexities and instabilities that lie beneath the seemingly straightforward associations of weapons with men and weaving with women.

In doing so, I will be treating weapons and weaving instruments as items of dress that were carried in one's hand or worn on one's body to display – or, as I will show, to transform – one's gendered identity. This is not to say that swords and spindles were not also, and indeed primarily, practical instruments. Weapons were tools of war, and weaving instruments were used in textile production, serving a specific function regardless of the gender of the person using them (see Garcia-Ventura 2014 for men attested as involved in textile production in Sumerian sources). But the two sets of objects also had a parallel function as symbolic markers of identity, as made clear by their use in rituals. A Sumerian incantation to ease childbirth is followed by a ritual carried out over the new-born child: "If it is a male, let him take a weapon, an axe, the force of his manliness. If it is a female, let the spindle and the pin be in her hand" (l. 46–47, Stol 2000, 61). Weapons and weaving instruments are here employed to ritually demarcate the infant's identity. Axes and spindles were thus not only used to fight and weave, but also to symbolically demarcate gender. Gender was part of the range of associations triggered by weapons and weaving instruments, so the very fact of carrying them on one's body would have influenced the way that this body was perceived by others. Women may have carried spindles in their hands for much of the day for no other reason than that spinning is a very time-consuming activity, but as a result, spindles also became part of their social appearance. "Physical appearance is a powerful and meaningful mediation of social categories and identities", as Marie Louise Stig Sørensen (1997, 93) puts it, and in this context, the inclusion of spindles in that physical appearance marked their wearer as belonging to the social category of women.

But what kind of category was this? What do I even mean by "gender"? Let us return to the birth incantation. The description of the ritual clearly relies on the assumption that one can tell baby boys from baby girls just by looking at them: the text presupposes that it will be clear to the ritual practitioner whether "it" is male or female. But the practice also relies on the notion that gender had to be constructed through other means than one's body, reinforced by items that made gender manifest. The text identifies the axe given to the boy as the "force of his manliness", but for a mewling new-born child, that force cannot be anything but symbolic – it was not something that could have sprung from his strength or behaviour alone. Gender was thus not just a property of the body, but also had to be actualized and made visible by other means.

"Gender", to me, refers to that process of "making visible by other means", whereby a supposedly inherent bodily property is exteriorized, symbolized, and made socially apparent. The process began at birth but certainly did not end there. The construction of gender is a continuous process, and social expectations demand that one must constantly present one's body as easily legible in terms of gender, that is, as clearly male or female. The creation of legibility involves a variety of

social practices, symbolic associations, and items of dress. Take *Two Women B*, a Sumerian debate between two women hurling insults at each other. One of them claims that her rival “is not fit for womanhood: she cannot comb wool, she cannot operate a spindle” (l. 66–68, Matuszak 2016, 246, 250; forthcoming). Being fit for womanhood thus included the ability to employ spindles, so womanhood was not merely given once and for all by one’s body but had to be repeatedly proven through the use of specific symbols. The symbolization of gender through weapons and weaving instruments was therefore not only a question of representation, but also of performance. Gender identity is something one does in the eyes of others, and weapons and weaving instruments served as the tools of that doing.

One might argue that there is a difference between biological sex, like the bodily properties allowing the ritual practitioner to identify the child as male or female, and cultural gender, like the use of weapons and spindles. But that division is difficult to maintain in an ancient context. Following Judith Butler (1990), I would argue that the recognition of the infant’s body as male or female would always have been shaped by culturally specific associations. We never see a naked body without a pre-existing filter of assumptions about what bodies mean and what they are supposed to look like. Biology always comes to us through the lens of discourse. Either way, in an ancient context that theoretical question is practically moot, since the biological bodies in question are lost to us. We do not have any kind of access to the sex of ancient individuals. All that is preserved are cultural products, such as texts and symbolic objects, so the construction of gender through cultural processes is all we can meaningfully hope to study (Helle 2018).

But crucially, the construction of gender in a social context is a far from stable process. Because gender did not emanate from an unchanging property of the body, but had to be constantly performed and made visible, it also became possible to negotiate gender through symbolic means. Gender could be reinforced, as in the birth ritual, or misperformed, as in *Two Woman B*, and below we will see that gender could also be transferred, transformed, disturbed, and turned against itself. Specifically, I will show that weapons and weaving instruments were used in a number of surprising ways to construct and reshape the gender of ancient individuals. Like all culturally significant items, weapons and weaving instruments were rich in connotations and symbolic potential. Over the following pages, I will delve into their ritual uses and poetic representations in ancient Near Eastern literature.

The manipulation of gender

A Hittite text known as “Paškuwatti’s Ritual” gives instructions for how to cure a man of effeminacy:

As regards the patient, I put in [his hands] a spindle and distaff, and he comes [forth] under the gates. When he passes [forwa]rd through the gates, I take away from him the spindle and distaff. I [g]ive him a bow [and arrows], and continuously

say thus: "Now I took womanhood away from you! I gave you manhood instead!" (Peled 2016, 311).

As noted in the introduction, masculinity was envisaged not as a constant condition that merely emanated from the body, but as something that could be built up or removed. The ritual employs the strategic potential that lies in the fluidity of socially constructed gender, that is, the possibility of actively manipulating gender through objects. By replacing female items with male ones, the ritual practitioner also replaces womanhood with manhood. And if masculinity could be constructed through symbols, it could also be deconstructed. Hoffner (1966, 331) notes a Hittite prayer with precisely the opposite intent of "Paškuwatti's Ritual", namely to undo masculinity. The ritual practitioner entreats Ishtar of Nineveh to impair the maleness of the enemy troops:

Take from the [enemy] men manhood, courage, vigor and *māl*, maces, bows, arrows [and] dagger(s), and bring them into Ḫatti. For those [*i.e.* the enemy] place in their hand the distaff and the spindle of a woman and dress them like women (Collins 2003, 164).

If taking away a man's weapons meant taking away his masculinity, then gender must have been seen as a rather versatile affair. In other words, the construction of gender through items made gender as mobile as those items themselves, at least in a ritual context where the movement of objects was imbued with magical efficacy. As Hoffner (1966, 334) puts it, the ritual client became "a kind of living dressmaker's dummy upon whom the practitioner could interchange the symbols which, accompanied by the proper spells, would effect the desired result".

Across the ancient Near East, the power to manipulate gender was thought to reside especially with Ishtar, known as Inana in Sumerian, the goddess of love, war, paradox, and transgression (Harris 1991). Inana was said to overturn all regulations established by other gods, and she is repeatedly attributed the power to reverse the gender of her followers. The Old Akkadian priestess Enheduana sings to her: "To turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man are yours, Inana" (l. 120, Sjöberg 1976, 190–191). Tellingly, this transformation is often accompanied by an exchange of weapons and weaving instruments. In *Ishme-Dagan K*, Inana is attributed the power

to turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man,
to change one into the other,
to dress young women in clothes for men on their right side,
to dress young men in clothes for women on their left side,
to put spindles into⁷ the hands of [men ...],
and to give weapons to women (l. 21–23 and edge, Römer 1988, 32).

Compared with the Hittite rituals, this passage takes the mobility of gender one step further. It is not only a matter of decreasing or increasing the masculinity of men, but of transferring masculinity to women and femininity to men. However, the passage

also reveals a further layer in the manipulation of gendered symbols. The passage describes three simultaneous but distinct operations – the reversal of gender, the reversal of gendered dress, and the reversal of gendered instruments. In other words, gender identity is depicted as consisting of three separate aspects: what one is, what one wears, and what one uses. To be seen as male one has to be a man, dress as a man, and use male items. It is possible to manipulate one of these aspects by manipulating the others – e.g. building up one’s masculinity by wearing weapons – but they remain fundamentally separate. Gender is not exactly the same as gendered symbols, though the two influence one another.

The simultaneous division and linkage between gender and dress made it possible for ancient individuals to disturb the seemingly straightforward equation between them. Some ritual practitioners associated with Ishtar, such as the *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*, are described as “carrier of the spindle” (*nāš pilakki*, Henshaw 1994, 301; Peled 2016, 272–277). The expression is a kind of conceptual oxymoron in Akkadian. The word for “carrier”, *nāšu*, is masculine, so a “carrier of the spindle” was both grammatically male and symbolically female, yielding a mismatch that disturbed the usual workings of gender.² The phrase suggests that the *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* wore spindles on their body during their rituals, indicating that their gender identity was neither unambiguously male nor female (for these figures in general, see most recently Svärd and Nissinen 2018). The three-fold division of gender into what one is, what one wears, and what one does thus allowed cultic performers to introduce an element of discord between the various layers. A similar logic is at play in Enheduana’s description of how Inana created the so-called “pilipili”, another distinctive form of gender identity: “She called for the pilipili, she broke the ... lance in pieces and as if she (the pilipili) were a male ... she (Inanna) gives her a weapon” (l. 82, Sjöberg 1976, 184–85, see also Svärd and Nissinen 2018, 390–391; Peled 2016, 267–270). Note that the pilipili is given the spear “as if she were a male” (*nita-gin₇*), meaning that she is not considered to be male as such (this may also be why Inana breaks the spear before giving it to her). Again, it is a purposeful mismatch between gender identity and gendered dress. This opens a rift in the underlying cultural logic, establishing a difference between gender and the way gender is made visible, thereby upsetting the social performance that was routinely associated with weapons and weaving.

The instability of cultural symbols

In the case of the pilipili and the carrier of the spindle, gender identity seems to remain largely unaffected by the reversal of gendered signs. The carriers of spindles are still grammatically male, and the pilpili’s wear a spear only “as if” they were male. But it is not always the case that gender identity remains stable. As we saw with *Ishme-Dagan K*, Inana had the power to change people’s genders as well as their dress, and the combination of the two could lead to unpredictable results. For example, the *Epic of*

Erra describes the destruction of the city of Uruk and the exile of its ritual performers. Among these are the aforementioned *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*, who are described as “those whose maleness Ishtar turned fe[male] for the awe of the people; carriers of swords, carriers of razors, scalpels, and blades, who break [taboos?] to Ishtar’s delight!” (l. IV 56–58, Cagni 1969, 110).³ The *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* are identified in two contradictory ways within the same stanza: they are both made female and made to carry weapons. Gender identity and gendered dress are thus portrayed as equally reversible, but they are also reversed in opposite directions.

To complicate matters further, in other texts *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* are identified with the epithet discussed above, “the carrier of the spindle”. In all cases discussed so far, even when there was a mismatch between gender and gendered items, at least each person carried only one such item at a time. However, the alternating attestations of *assinnu* and *kurgarrû* as carriers of spindles and of swords shows just how unpredictable gender becomes when it is constructed through mobile objects – the same individuals can carry spindles in one context and weapons in another (see also Garcia-Ventura 2014, 170). The symbols of gender could not only be flipped and reversed, but also doubled and combined, colliding or alternating with one another.

But there is a further layer of complexity at play here. So far, I have assumed that even as they moved around in various ways, the symbols themselves remained fairly stable, with weaving always representing femininity and weapons always representing masculinity. However, there are instances that suggest that these symbols were not always as easily legible as one might assume. For example, Laura Mazow (2017) discusses archaeological evidence from Iron Age Turkey of a so-called “weaving sword”, a tool well known from other ethnographic contexts. It is a sword-shaped beater used to press textiles together, pushing new rows of weft into the weave. It can be made of wood, bone, or metal, but as Mazow (2017, 11) points out, it can also be made by repurposing a sword originally meant for combat. Though weaving swords were not habitually worn on the body in the same way as spindles were, they are still a reminder that, functionally, the difference between instruments of weaving and warfare could be surprisingly small. In some cases, the materiality and practicalities of the tools led to a surprising symbolic ambiguity. The spindle is a case in point. Though it was clearly seen as a female instrument, the way it was actually used in textile production, in a continuous spinning motion, invited other symbolic associations as well: reversal, transformation, and change. Consider the passage from *Ishme-Dagan K* discussed above, where Inana is given the power to “to change one into the other” and “to put spindles into the hands of men”. The Sumerian word for “change” here is “bala”, but “bala” could also mean “spindle”. The juxtaposition of the two meanings in the same stanza gives the spindle an ambiguous connotation: it is a quintessential symbol of femininity but also connotes the reversal of gender. As a cultural sign, the spindle thus stands for its own negation (see Helle 2018, 29).

The same kind of double meaning might also apply to weapons. Many of the weapons associated with Ishtar are cutting weapons, like swords and daggers. As noted by Julia Assante (2009, 45), such weapons could also have signified Ishtar's power to transform the lives of her followers:

[The *assinnu* and *kurgarrû*] paradigm about wielding sharp-edged tools probably serves as an outward and ominous warning to the people of Ishtar's special power over individual fates. [...] The goddess's weapon-wielding functionaries remind the people that she keeps fate balanced on a razor's edge, as it were.

Assante suggests that weapons were not only symbols of masculinity but also of transformation. While the idea cannot be proven definitively with the evidence presently at our disposal, it cannot simply be dismissed either. We have to bear in mind that the symbols at work in ancient cultures were necessarily polyvalent, complex, and ambiguous, and Assante challenges us to keep these multiple meanings in mind at the same time. Like the spinning of the spindle, the edge of a sword might have indicated two things at once: a specific gender and the reversal of that gender.

Weapons and weaving in modern scholarship

I have argued that in the ancient Near East, weapons and weaving instruments served as symbolic items of dress, and that the representation of gender through symbols allowed for a series of complex cultural performances. However, modern scholarship has not always been sensitive to the depth of that complexity. Scholars tend to underplay the rich variation we find in our material, presenting instead a rather straightforward equivalence between sexes and symbols. Jerrold Cooper (2017, 113), for example, writes that:

I have grown more willing to acknowledge the power of nature and recognize the limits of nurture. The similarity of distinct basic gender roles in the vast majority of known cultures must to a large extent be determined by biological universals: women give birth and nurse, and men are, on average, somewhat larger and more muscular than women, giving them significant advantages in wielding weapons for the hunt and war.

I will not delve into the question of whether we can assume a causality between biology and cross-cultural patterns. Rather, what strikes me about the passage is the context in which it appears. Cooper makes this claim just after presenting a passage from *Enki and the World Order* where Inana is told that she can make men into women and women into men, and put spindles into the hands of male warriors. Cooper's account of biological difference thus seems to be at odds with the text that he is actually discussing. Even if the gendered patterns of weapons and weaving did indeed follow from the biology of our bodies, how would that help us understand the reversals that we find in our texts? As I see it, we cannot account for the complexity of culture by appealing to a supposed simplicity of biology (Helle 2018, 29).

Even when scholars do note a reversal of gendered dress, they often undermine its significance. For example, Jak Yakar and Avia Taffet (2007, 783) describe the association between spindles and femininity in ancient Anatolia, noting that “[i]t is generally maintained that in view of women’s natural ability to absorb the creative intricacies of weaving, this craft as well as spinning became the epithets of women’s wisdom, loyalty and housekeeping since prehistoric times”. They go on to discuss a Canaanite text that associates spindles with the goddess Asherah:

According to this myth, when her amorous advances to Baal were not reciprocated, Ašerah threatened to destroy him: “With my word I will oppress you; with my spindle I will pierce you!” This passage might reflect the existence of a popular belief that the spindle at the hand of a vindictive female with supernatural powers could be used as a lethal weapon (Yakar and Taffet 2007, 783).

The quoted passage clearly presents an inversion of the spindles’ usual connotations. Asherah threatens to use a spindle as a weapon, conflating a symbolic opposition that served as the cornerstone for the representation of gender in the ancient Near East. But Yakar and Taffet undermine the force of that subversion through the language of their discussion. According to them, the use of spindles in weaving springs from women’s “natural abilities”, while the use of spindles as weapons bespeaks “supernatural powers”. Household weaving is a natural epithet of femininity, and not only in the ancient Near East – it is something that is “generally maintained”. Weaponized weaving, by contrast, is merely a “popular belief” that seems fanciful at best (“*might reflect*”, “*could be used*”). Those who use their spindles for weaving are referred to as “women”, while the goddess who threatens to use it as a weapon is referred to as a “female”.

This kind of language registers a disinclination among scholars towards working with texts that depart from our conventions about the workings of gender. But if we cling to our contemporary and normalized expectations, assuming that symbols always function in the same way and with the same meaning, we risk missing much of the complexity, subtleties, and indeed the beauty of the texts we study.

Case study: *The Elevation of Ishtar*

An example of such complexity is a passage from *The Elevation of Ishtar*, a bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian text that describes the elevation of Ishtar to supreme kingship among the gods. It was most likely composed during the Neo-Assyrian period and was attributed by the ancient scholars to the lamentation priest Taqisha-Gula (Veldhuis 2018, 198–201). It is a highly difficult text, but a new electronic edition has recently been made available.⁴ In a crucial but fragmentary passage, the hymn collapses the symbolic contrast between weapons and weaving:

With knife and dagger, the sharp edge of a knife [...]
The ones who carry knives at their sides, Inana [...]
Their seven lions with raised paws [...]

With the dust storm stirred up by their running, [...]

Protectress of womanhood, equipment, and the weapon of defeat [...]

Inana, like the rope of your net, the *asag*-demon that no one can [...]

And like a spindle, [...] a settlement.

Lady, like [throwing] a discarded loincloth at the wicked one [...]

For the wicked and the evil one, like [...]

[...] straight like a taught cord, the good? spear [...]

[...] catastrophe [...]

Daughter of Sin, both your arms like [...]

Lady, like a needle, the angry dagger [...]

Your heddle, like a bow ... the tendon [...]

May the arrowhead, piercer of heart and lungs, fly like a shuttle!

Ishtar, make war and battle whirl around like a skipping rope!

Like ball and mallet, lady of battle, let battles clash!

Goddess of strife, pursue battle like playing with dolls!

Lady, where weapons clash, play with the chaos like knucklebones!

(IV obv. 3'-rev. 9)⁵

The passage is challenging to say the least, but in the last lines, the poetic structure of the text becomes somewhat clearer. Here the metaphors establish a similarity between what are otherwise opposite cultural symbols: play and battle, childish amusement and lethal danger. The shuttle of the loom is said to fly like an arrowhead, and as with Mazow's weaving sword, the text thereby points to a functional likeness between weapons and weaving instruments which undermines their symbolic opposition. Just like Asherah's spindle, here the female shuttle is given to power to pierce and penetrate as effectively as the phallic arrowhead. Weapons and weaving become one.

We may then move backwards through the text, tentatively assuming that something similar is going on in the more fragmentary part of the passage. Here, weapons are compared to spindles, cords, and needles, but surprisingly, the comparison also moves in the opposite direction: weaving instruments are compared to weapons, as when Ishtar's heddle is said to be like a bow. Weaving is a metaphor of warfare, but warfare is also a metaphor for weaving. The various images follow each other in rapid succession, alternating between the two sets of symbols and so making it difficult to keep of track of which is the source and which the target of the metaphor: needle, dagger, heddle, bow, arrowhead, shuttle... Taqisha-Gula thus develops what can only be described as a "poetics of mixed metaphors", applying it in full force to the representation of gender. The comparisons complicate any easy distinction between the two main gender signifiers of cuneiform cultures, folding them inextricably together.

Conclusion

In sum, *The Elevation of Ishtar* illustrates the three main arguments of this essay. Firstly, the passage relies on a broader cultural assumption that weapons were male

and weaving instruments female. In the ancient Near East, weapons and weaving instruments were always both tools and symbols, that is, both practical instruments and items of dress which were worn on the body to make one's gendered identity socially visible.

Secondly, the passage then goes on to undermine that cultural association, combining weaving and weapons in novel ways. Since gender identity was represented through items, it became possible to manipulate gender by moving those items around. Masculinity and femininity could be reinforced, impaired, reversed, or even subverted through the transfer of symbols.

Thirdly, the passage stresses the unpredictability of this operation. The movement of gender symbols led to complex and unforeseeable combinations. Men could become less male by wearing spindles, women could wear weapons while remaining women, men could be turned into women while wearing swords, and the same individuals could wear spindles in one context and daggers in another. It could even be difficult to tell which items counted as weapons and which as weaving instruments, since one could pierce with spindles and weave with swords. In the *Elevation of Ishtar*, this symbolic confusion is employed to highlight the power of Ishtar, who plays with chaos as with knucklebones. All rules can be overturned at her decree, and mortals can do nothing but bow to her might.

Notes

- 1 My heartfelt thanks go to the editor, Megan Cifarelli, for her kind and spirited support, and to the anonymous reviewer for the helpful suggestions.
- 2 Though grammatical gender is not always a clear indicator of either cultural gender or biological sex. See Helle (2018, 25, fn. 13).
- 3 The passage is a staple of discussions of non-normative gender in the ancient Near East. For previous literature, see e.g. Svärd and Nissinen (2018, 391–92), Peled (2014, 288–90), Assante (2009, 44–45), and Helle (2018, 32), with references.
- 4 Available online through the “Bilinguals in Late Mesopotamian Scholarship” project, at <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/blms/corpus>, under “The Elevation of Ishtar” (accessed 21 September 2018).
- 5 From ms. 1880–07–19, 281, edited by Jeremiah Peterson. Where the Sumerian and the Akkadian versions disagree, I follow the Sumerian.

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Chapter 8

Israelite high priestly apparel: embodying an identity between human and divine

Christine Palmer

Abstract

In ancient Israelite religious practice, the investiture of the high priest is instrumental in the construction and performance of his ritual identity. Sacral apparel transforms a man into a priest by transferring him from the realm of the common into the realm of the holy. Arrayed in garments reflective of the sanctuary in their styling and fabrication, the high priest serves as an extension of the sanctuary by becoming an access point to the divine. This article explores the manner in which the consecrated, dressed, and ornamented priestly body is a socially constructed microcosm of the divine-human relationship.

Embedded within the text of the Hebrew Bible is an artefact of ancient worship that requires a certain excavation in its own right.¹ High priestly dress, contextualized in the time and space of ritual activity, is preserved in priestly texts with an unprecedented richness of descriptive detail. This is no wonder since dress – clothing, ornamentation, and body modification – is instrumental in mediating social, legal, and ritual relationships within its cultural environment. Dress is dynamic in the construction of identity. Ceremonial dress especially has the power to fashion a unique identity that bridges the worlds of human and divine. In biblical Israel, a ritual identity is constructed for the high priest through ceremonial investiture with golden garments of preeminent fabrics, precious stones, and a gold-leaf plate emblazoned with the divine name worn upon the forehead. The distinctive identity forged at his installation is lived out through his dressed body. Dress performatively fashions a bond between the worlds the high priest represents, making him an access point to the divine and his dressed body a meeting place of heaven and earth.²

Installation and construction of identity

The high priest is installed to office at the entrance to the tent shrine where he undergoes a week-long consecration rite to fashion his person for divine service (Exodus 29). His body must reflect maximal holiness in order to be granted access to the holiest areas of the sanctuary forbidden to all others. His is unlike any other body in Israel: it is shaped by higher purity standards, elevated through ceremonial anointing, and adorned with sumptuous fabrics. He is to have no physical defect or blemish: no blindness, lameness, crippling disfigurement, nor his body scarred or skin diseased. His hair must be dressed following strict protocol: he must not shave his head or beard, put off his priestly turban, or dishevel his hair. The high priest must present the image of perfect corporeal wholeness in an unblemished physical body to embody his consecrated identity (Leviticus 21). He is further set apart by distinctive dress that is of the highest order of holiness and can only be worn by one man at one time in all of Israel.

Priestly dress is a ritual object in its own right that belongs to the sphere of the divine. It does not belong to the man, but to the sanctuary; it is not his personal dress but the identity-creating attire of the ordained priesthood. The high priest must be robed for seven days in the garments that confer upon him the priesthood, during which time he must remain within the boundaries of sacred space (Leviticus 8:33). Dressed in holy apparel, he is “made holy” (Leviticus 8:12) and granted access to serve in the Holy Place. Investiture is instrumental in the construction of priestly identity, effectuating ritual movement from the sphere of “common” to “holy” in order to install him as high priest. In the absence of prescribed ritual dress, he is no longer recognizable as part of the sanctuary. He is out of place, a common Israelite, an encroacher on holy ground and liable to the punishment of death (Exodus 28:35, 43).

The installation rite begins with the high priest shedding his ordinary clothes as he sheds the identity of a common Israelite. His body is washed and then dressed with the sacral garments that will confer a new identity. He is ceremoniously vested, layer by layer, before the eyes of the gathered community whom he will represent. He is then anointed with holy oil reserved exclusively for the sanctuary and its furnishings (Exodus 30:32). The oil is infused with two parts finest myrrh, one part cinnamon, and one part aromatic cane in a ratio of 4 kg of fragrant spices per litre of olive oil (Propp 2006, 482). Where a few drops of the costly oil would suffice to scent the priest, the biblical image is one of profuse outpouring poetically recalled as: “precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes” (Psalm 133:2). The richly evocative image preserves this ritual moment as one that created an unforgettable sensory impression for both priest and community. The high priest doubtless perpetuates the sensory experience as he ministers in the tent shrine clad in fragrant robes. Next, he is anointed with a mixture of oil and sacrificial blood on his clothing and extremities (right ear, thumb, and big toe). The rite is replicated on the sacrificial altar whose extremities – its horns – are daubed with the remaining oil and blood. The ceremony indexes a relationship

between the priest and the altar at which he will serve, as they are both brought into the shared ritual state of “holy” through anointing. During the course of the installation ceremony, the tent shrine’s hangings and articles of furniture receive the same ritual treatment as the high priest whose body is treated as though it is a ritual accessory of the sanctuary.

All the while, the priest is a passive recipient of the rites performed upon him to dedicate him to service, remaining “inert” until such time as he can live out of his embodied identity. He is ever aware of being acted upon as he is transformed from a common man into a holy man on holy ground. In the eyes of the assembled community, he is being visually “constructed” as his priestly identity is being constructed, layer by layer and rite by rite. The biblical text presents the assembly of the tent shrine and its coverings in like manner. Only after the tent is physically assembled – its wood frames attached, multi-layered coverings draped over the structure, and its articles anointed – that it is filled with the divine presence to become a fully functioning sanctuary. So also the man who will serve in its courts: his sacral identity must first be constructed and conferred through ritual investiture before he is able to serve on behalf of the nation.³

Dress perpetuates this sacral identity in the hereditary office of the priesthood (Numbers 20:25–29). For a son to succeed his father as priest, he is invested with the same ritual uniform as his father for the duration of a seven-day cycle (Exodus 29:29–30). The holy garments have the performative power to bequeath identity. Textiles and ornaments consecrated for use in the sanctuary are imbued with a quality of the numinous so that they confer upon the wearer and successor not merely the appearance of the priestly office, but its full authority, power, and divine sanction. Dress becomes a symbol of continuity in Israel’s worship and in the inter-generational construction of priestly identity.

Sacral apparel

Biblical texts present the priesthood as clothed in linen turbans, loincloths, and tunics with embroidered sashes. In addition, the high priest dons four distinctive articles of apparel unique to his office: a floral frontlet, robe of blue-violet, breastpiece with signet seals, and the golden ephod.

Floral frontlet

The high priest is adorned with a thin, gold-leaf plate [šîš] that stretches across his forehead (Plate 8.1). The šîš, meaning “to blossom, shine”, is decorated with a floral motif (likely a rosette) and is inscribed with the epigraph “Holy to Yahweh” (Exodus 28:36). In Israel’s worship, “Holy to Yahweh” refers to that which has been dedicated to the sphere of the divine and is under Yahweh’s claim of ownership, such as sacrifices and objects of ceremonial use. The frontlet’s inscription displays

the priest's integration into the divine world and is "tantamount to a declaration of citizenship in that realm" (Wilson 1994, 32).

Priestly identity is also fashioned by the rosette, an emblem that features prominently in royal-ritual contexts of the ancient Near East. Judean storage jars dating from the last third of the 7th century through 586 BCE are stamped on the handles with rosettes to designate their contents as belonging to the royal administration (Lipschits, Sergi and Koch 2011, 8). The priest is similarly "stamped" as belonging to the realm of the divine. Further, the blue cord by which the frontlet is tied around the head is the type of cord used in hanging cylinder seals, thus reinforcing the image of Yahweh's personal marking. The inscribed floral frontlet is a recognizable emblem of consecration and mark of ownership on the body's most visible part. While no permanent body markings such as branding, tattooing, or piercing are permitted on the high priest's body, he is in fact inscribed through ornamentation that is "permanent" by way of its material construction in precious metal not subject to decay, yet also removable, making ritual identity transferrable to the next generation.

The frontlet's ritual instrumentality is interpreted in the text as related to the removal of Israel's guilt so that they may in turn experience divine favour: "[the priest] shall remove the guilt associated with Israel's sacred offerings...that they may find favour before Yahweh" (Exodus 28:38). The power to remove guilt resides within Israel's sacrificial system over which the high priest presides. As Yahweh's chosen representative, he works for the restoration of relationship between the worshipper and his God through offerings at the altar (Milgrom 1991, 623; Schwartz 1995, 16). Donning the frontlet in ritual service accomplishes an exchange between heaven and earth where sin is removed and divine acceptance is gained for the community.

The floral frontlet fashions a sacral identity that marks the high priest as a participant in the divine world. The priestly body – whole, unblemished, and unmarked – is the exclusive property of Yahweh who alone reserves the right to mark it.⁴ Stamped with the divine name, the priest bears a mark that is an extension of a heavenly identity. As he daily stretches the frontlet across his forehead, it calls forth an intentionality in his ritual actions knowing that he is Yahweh's representative on earth set apart to serve in the divine household.

Robe of blue-violet

The priest's robe [*me'il*] is a prestige textile dyed a richly saturated blue-violet deriving from the gland of the *Murex* snail that would have required several thousand snails for a single garment (Ruscillo 2005, 104). The robe's hem is finished with hanging pomegranate tassels of variegated blue-violet, red-purple, and cochineal-crimson wools with twined linen that alternate with golden bells. A golden bell with a silver clapper roughly 1 cm in diameter that may illuminate the robe's idiophonic adornment has been unearthed from the Hellenistic era temple context of Mount

Gerizim (Plate 8.2) (Magen 2008, 156). There is visual symmetry in the garments of the priest whose extremities are gilded with gold – the frontlet at his head and bells at his feet. The hem, in its musical adornment, announces the priest's arrival before the divine presence as one might be announced at a royal court, its decorative trim of alternating pomegranates and golden bells onomatopoeically ringing out: *pa'āmōn ve-rimmōn!*

The technical vocabulary for bell [*pa'āmōn*] derives from aspects of the foot [*pa'ām*] in motion – “step, pace, foot, time” – granting insight into its embodied instrumentality. The high priest sets ritual time in motion, beginning it and ending it by the putting on and taking off of his ceremonial dress. During priestly service he embodies the distinctive sounds associated with worship to bring together in his physical person sacred time and sacred space.

The priest's lived-in experience carries a heightened awareness of his every move that strikes a sound with each step he takes on holy ground. There is a melody to his movements and a beauty to the ringing rituals, yet this is tempered by a sense of danger as he crosses ritual boundaries to appear before the divine presence. His very approach is fraught with peril as is signalled by the bells that are “for officiating, so his sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before Yahweh and when he comes out, that he may not die” (Exodus 28:35).

Breastpiece with signet seals

Over the blue-violet robe the priest wears a pouch known as the breastpiece [*hōšēn*]. Fabric of variegated wool and linen weave is folded over to create a 23 cm² pouch that serves as a receptacle for the sacred lots through which Yahweh reveals his will, as well as a canvas for mounting twelve signet seals that represent the tribes of Israel. The signets are represented in the text as aniconic and engraved with the names of eponymous tribal ancestors in the tradition of Hebrew epigraphic seals (Avigad and Sass 1997, 33). The seals are not attached by customary toggle pins, but are permanently mounted into settings of plaited gold on the breastpiece and on the shoulder straps of the ephod (see below). As such, they are not intended for sealing.

The high priest is charged with bearing “the names of the Israelites on the breastpiece of decision upon his heart as he enters the sanctuary for a continual memorial before Yahweh” (Exodus 28:29). The ritual instrumentality of the priestly signets recalls the practice of depositing votive seals in places of worship (Tigay 2007, 355). Yet, the inscribed signets are not to remain in the sanctuary, but rather are carried upon the high priest affixed to his dress. The inscribed gemstones are concrete tokens directed toward Yahweh's viewing and remembering of his people Israel. The stones of the breastpiece would ostensibly be viewed from Yahweh's throne room before which the priest directly stands when burning incense, while the stones on the shoulder straps would be viewed from his heavenly abode above.

Remembrance in biblical Israel involves action; to evoke Yahweh's remembrance is to call upon his blessing, provision, and care. In his sacral role, Israel's high priest embodies a permanent aesthetic petition for blessing.

The engraved seals may be seen to lay a different claim of ownership than that of the frontlet, forging a priestly identity not only as Yahweh's representative, but the people's as well. The stones for remembrance worn upon the body of Israel's mediator are contextualized in worship; it is not merely their presence in the sanctuary that is significant, but their presence at the appointed times of ritual. It is as if all Israel is brought before the presence of Yahweh to participate in ritual service through the sacral apparel of the man who embodies their worship. As the high priest engages in daily service, his body becomes the locus through which a continual memorial is perpetuated.

Golden ephod

The most distinctive item of all sacral apparel is the ephod. It is fashioned of dyed wool and twined linen in the pre-eminent weaving technique of figural design [*hōšeb*] used also in the tent shrine's inner curtains and the veil that hangs before the inner sanctum. The ephod is shaped like an apron that binds tightly around the torso and leaves an opening in the front for affixing the breastpiece. Cords of blue-violet yarn and gold chains of plaited work are strung through golden rings to attach the breastpiece. The ephod is used in obtaining oracles through the lots contained in its pouch (1 Samuel 23:9–11; 30:7–8). Divinely sanctioned divination is the exclusive prerogative of the high priest who wears the lots upon his person and who alone is authorized to read and interpret them (Deuteronomy 33:8). This elevates the ephod in Israel's religious experience to become an access point to the divine, attire through which Yahweh reveals his will and communicates with his people.

What categorically sets the ephod apart is its prolific gold embellishment: "Gold leaf was hammered out and cut into threads to work *into* the blue-violet and *into* the red-purple and *into* the cochineal-crimson yarns, and *into* the twined linen in figural design" (Exodus 39:3). The repetition of weaving "*into*" each coloured thread suggests that a cord of hammered sheet gold is interwoven with each individual strand of the dyed wool yarns and twined linen, making the composition of each thread half gold (Milgrom 1991, 502). This bears out lexically, where the feminine form of ephod [*aphuddah*] refers to a "close-fitting covering" found in poetic parallel to the sheet metal overlay of cast images (Isaiah 30:22). Girded in the tight-fitting metallic ephod, the high priest indeed appears gold-plated!

The ephod creates an "otherness" that defines the high priestly office, fashioned entirely of a restricted wool and linen mixture and woven of culturally-recognized sacerdotal fabrics associated with divine dwelling. The hammered sheet gold woven into its fabric renders this a stiff outer layer that creates a ceremonious formality, its weight slowing the priest's movements to a deliberate and stately procession

within the sanctuary. The visual splendour of this luminous article of apparel makes a spectacular appeal to the senses. Clad in the sheath-like golden garment, the high priest appears radiant by the light of the sun in the courtyard and radiant by the light of the lampstand in the Holy Place. The visual cue the high priest offers vested in such attire is that he radiates a divine luminosity.

Prophetic vision gives expression to the divine presence as “...the appearance of a human being; from his waist upwards like gleaming electrum, having the appearance of fire enclosing him round about; and from the appearance of his loins downward... the likeness of fire, and brightness all around him, like the appearance of the rainbow that is in the cloud on a rainy day... such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh” (Ezekiel 1:27–28). The vision of heavenly fire, encasing metal, and rainbow brilliance cast their shadow onto the priestly ephod and jewelled breastpiece, suggesting that the high priest’s garments replicate in textile the ineffable splendour of the divine presence that indwells the tent shrine.

Replication of sacred space

Arrayed in sumptuous garments, the high priest re-images the glorious sanctuary. His multi-layered garments invite comparison with the tent shrine’s layered coverings and hangings. In its styling, the straight-lined seamless robe resembles a scaled-down tent. The golden rings, gold chains of plaited work, and blue fastening cords call to mind tent pegs, hooks, and ropes. Textiles dyed in the sacramental colours of blue-violet, red-purple, and cochineal-crimson drape sanctuary and priest alike to create a visual recapitulation. In a culture where colour in fabric was commonly obtained by mixing shades of natural animal wool to produce various hues of yellow and brown, dyeing produces textiles outside the realm of everyday life that are exclusive to the sanctuary (Koren 1993, 17). The material workmanship of variegated woollen yarns with twined linen [*ša’atnēz*] is a culturally-designated sacerdotal fabric forbidden to ordinary Israelites (Deuteronomy 22:11); its usage is reserved exclusively for the realm of the holy, restricted to the sanctuary and to its chief attendant. The rarity of this “holy” mixture may be adduced in the textile finds of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud: of some 120 textile fragments found dating to Iron II, only three are of a wool and linen mixture (Sheffer 2012, 289).

Priestly apparel is designed as an integral part of the sanctuary assemblage and so reflects a technical and material correspondence with it. For example, the pouch-like breastpiece fashioned of fabric folded double [*kāphal*] recalls the curtain doubled over at the entrance to the tent (Exodus 28:16; 26:9). The rings [*ṭaba’at*] through which the breastpiece attaches to the ephod are found replicated in the tent shrine for securing the framework’s crossbars (Exodus 26:24; 28:23). Blue-violet cords [*tekēlet*] strung through the gold fastener rings of the breastpiece are replicated in blue-violet loops strung through gold rings to hang embroidered curtains over the tent’s wooden framework (Exodus 28:28; 26:4). As the ephod is drawn over the layered garments and

fastened by a coupling at its back [*maḥberet*], so the curtains are coupled in hanging over the tent shrine's wooden frame (Exodus 28:27; 26:3–4).

Parallels abound with textual descriptions of temple architecture. The chains by which the breastpiece is hung, described as a root or vine, are replicated in arboreal motifs on the capitals of bronze pillars and as ornamentation of the cedar wood in the nave (1 Kings 7:17). The golden frontlet's floral motif is echoed throughout temple décor in the carved open flowers among the gourds and palm trees (1 Kings 6:29), and in the ten golden lampstands each fashioned as a tree with branches, flowers, and almond blossoms (1 Kings 7:49). Pomegranates encircling the hem of the priestly robe are reproduced by the hundreds as a favoured decorative motif on column capitals (1 Kings 7:42). The gold embellishment of priestly dress in the ephod's weave, gleaming frontlet, and miniature bells is multiplied in the temple's interior – gold-leaf gilds the carved engravings and overlays sanctuary furnishings, beams, thresholds, walls, and doors (1 Kings 6:21–22). Doubtless, the high priest resembles the sanctuary in miniature – he replicates it in his investiture – but why construct a bodily architecture analogous to the sanctuary? What are the implications for the performance of his ritual identity?

Ritual body connecting heaven and earth

In the material world of the ancient Near East, repetition implies continuity – a continuity with intensification and dramatic heightening (Winter 2003, 256–257). Israel's sacred tent is the *axis mundi*, the holy ground where heaven and earth meet, the locus of the divine dwelling on earth (Leviticus 26:11–12). The repetition woven into the sacral garments renders the high priest an *extension* of the tent of meeting – of one cloth and of one purpose with it. The priest's consecrated, dressed, and ornamented body thus comes to serve as an access point to the divine.

In this, priestly investiture bears striking affinity to the installation of Mesopotamian cult statues that presence an image of the deity through which the god may be accessed on earth. The cult statue is vivified in rites known as the opening of the mouth [*pīt pī*] and washing of the mouth [*mīs pī*] to activate its senses so that it can see, hear, speak, and engage its world. The anthropomorphic statue is installed in the cella of the temple where it is washed, fed, and then clothed in sumptuous garments reflecting a divine sartorial splendour described in Mesopotamian texts as a fiery cloak and luminous headdress (CAD s.v. *melammu*). The cult image replicates the god's awe-inspiring splendour in its dress: gold sheathing of the body, gemstone inlays, and embroidered fabrics embellished with gold foil appliqués in the shape of rosettes, discs, and arboreal motifs (Oppenheim 1949). Worshippers encounter the god during festal ceremonial processions that bring the temple image bedecked in luminous apparel before their gaze. The cult statue is perceived as more than a *representation* of the divine, but as an actual *manifestation* of the presence of deity as its epiphany (Dick 2005). In Mesopotamian religious thought, it is “an image imbued

with a god, and, as such, it possesses[s] the character of both earthly reality and divine presence” (Berlejung 1997, 46).

In biblical Israel, the stark prohibition of crafting any image to represent Yahweh precludes that a cult statue serve as a body for divine indwelling (Exodus 32; Deuteronomy 5:8–10). Instead, it is the consecrated body of the high priest that serves as an access point to the divine. The priest’s sacral apparel may be viewed as a “mode of presencing” (Bahrani 2003), putting on display a sartorial “image of God” where the multisensory experience of worship may be engaged. As with the Mesopotamian cult statue, something greater than merely a reflection of sacred space is intended. The entire worship experience of the tent shrine – the sights, sounds, and smells of a fully sensorial encounter with the divine – is embodied by Israel’s high priest.

Twice daily – every morning and at twilight – the priest washes and clothes himself in ceremonial apparel to enter the sacred tent of worship. The chiming bells at his feet announce his presence in the sanctuary to signal the beginning of ritual time. He burns fragrant incense on the golden altar before the cherubim-embroidered veil and tends the free-standing lampstand, filling it with pure oil to keep it burning throughout the night. He is girded with the golden ephod that gleams in the light of the lampstand with a kind of divine splendour, presencing divine glory through its luminosity and ornamentation.

At these appointed times, the high priest’s body becomes the locus of Israel’s meeting with their God. He bears the twelve signets into the Holy Place where they *speak* on behalf of the nation to entreat Yahweh’s favour and blessing. The signet seals awaken divine remembrance and the gold-leaf frontlet awakens divine grace to attend it. The priest inquires of Yahweh through the sacred lots in the breastpiece pouch and waits for Yahweh in turn to *speak* and to answer his people by manifesting his will in oracles that are read and uttered by their wearer. The priest lives out the identity of a mediator, inscribed with the names of both covenant parties he represents. On his breast he carries the twelve seals of Israel, while on his forehead he is marked with the name of their God. Though the two are physically separated by successive barriers in the sanctuary, they are brought together on the body of the man who stands between heaven and earth.

Ritual service concludes when the high priest emerges from the tent shrine to offer the daily sacrifice at the altar and pronounce the priestly benediction over the gathered worshippers: “May Yahweh bless you and keep you; May Yahweh make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; May Yahweh lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24–26). Particularly illuminating is the second line of the benediction. The anthropomorphic imagery of this petition is hard to miss. Adorned with the gleaming golden frontlet, the priest intones the blessing while he himself embodies Yahweh’s radiant countenance (Plate 8.3). To see, hear, remember, and proclaim favour are exchanges between the human and divine realms, all of which are enacted through the high priest.

Though ordinary Israelites may be barred from entering the sanctuary, they nevertheless experience its worship through their mediator – they hear the golden-toned ringing of the priest’s bells drifting past the tapestried gateway; they smell the fragrant incense that clings to his redolent robes; they take in the richness of embroidered textiles of vibrant hues interwoven with gold. They can now envision the mystery of the tent shrine’s inner chambers and experience its worship *through him*. The high priest is an access point to the divine. He is a man “between worlds” – bridging them and embodying them as a microcosm of the divine-human relationship.

Notes

- 1 Priestly dress as a “textual” artefact is preserved in strata of the Hebrew Bible that are shaped by priestly traditions but is nonetheless viewed as representing physical realia of ancient Israelite worship. The discussion that follows reflects practices as represented in the literature of ancient Israel and designated as “biblical” Israelite worship. For an archaeological reconstruction of priestly dress, see Palmer 2015.
- 2 This article is based on a paper given at the Approaches to Dress and the Body session of ASOR, Boston 2017. My gratitude extends to Megan Cifarelli for inviting me to participate in the session and to contribute to this publication.
- 3 The identification of priest and sanctuary is furthered by the use of anthropomorphic terminology in reference to the tent shrine. The top of the frame is called a “head” (Exodus 26:24), its side a “rib” (Exodus 26:26), and the two tenons that connect each frame are “arms” (Exodus 26:17). The entrance is termed a “face” (Exodus 26:9) and to its sides are “shoulders” (Exodus 27:14).
- 4 Ancient Israelite culture is one familiar with divine markings on the forehead: Cain singled out for protection (Genesis 4:15), Jerusalemites to be spared from Yahweh’s wrath (Ezekiel 9:4), as with all Israel enjoined to wear God’s words as a “headband” to distinguish them as people belonging to Yahweh among the nations (Deuteronomy 6:8).

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Part Three

Communal selves

Chapter 9

A feather in your cap: symbols of “Philistine” warrior status?

Josephine A. Verduci

Abstract

Artistic representations of ancient societies, regardless of their historical accuracy, can engender a fascination that leads to long-held characterisations that become embedded in modern perceptions. The iconographical expression of Philistine identity in the visual arts has often relied upon the communicative aspect of costume, framed by ideologies prescribed by convention and tradition. This article presents an overview of Philistine costume, largely drawn from the Egyptian depictions of the Sea Peoples in the Medinet Habu reliefs. The aim is to distinguish the purpose of the so-called “feathered” headwear and to offer a new perspective on costume in relation to cultural expression in the terminal Late Bronze Age (LBA) and Early Iron Age (EIA).¹

Introduction

To date, what little is known about Philistine (*Peleset*) dress and adornment includes the heavily documented, but poorly understood, “feathered” headdress depicted in the reliefs of the battles between the Egyptian forces and the Sea Peoples at the mortuary temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu (c. 1175 BCE) (Adams and Cohen 2013, 662–664) (Fig. 9.1). The headdress consists of a lower ovoid band that is decorated with a row of circles or rings (or less commonly a zigzag design), a neck guard fitted to the back of the head, and often a chinstrap. The band is surmounted by an upright material depicted by vertical lines, which is generally described as feathers although it was possibly constructed of strips of boar’s tusks, leather, folded linen, reeds, or the warrior’s own hair (Sandars 1978, 134). While the headdress depicted at Medinet Habu is an aspect of Egyptian visual culture rather than a category of Philistine material culture, similar forms of headwear also occur in artistic representations from Italy, Greece, Crete, western Anatolia, Cyprus, and the Near East.

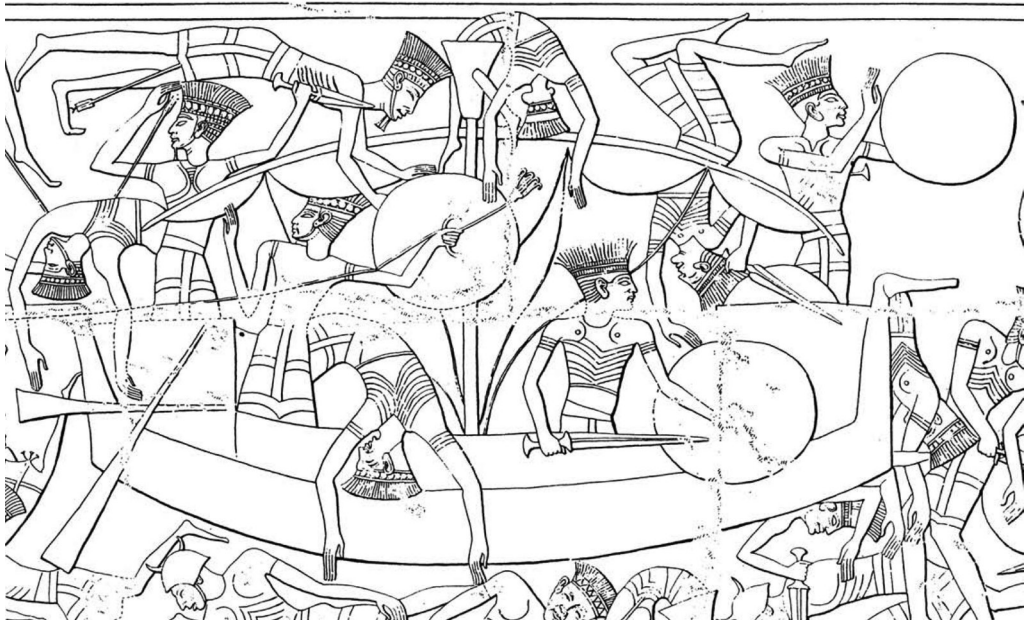


Fig. 9.1 The Sea Peoples as depicted at Medinet Habu (Breasted 1930, pl. 39. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute Chicago).

Regardless of the veracity of propaganda-driven depictions of the Sea Peoples at Medinet Habu, dress and adornment are amongst the most important visual tools in distinguishing individuals and groups, and they enable people to be actively involved in constructing their own identity (Knapp 2010, 195). The multiplicity inherent between actual history and an idealized concept of identity means that various features – such as gender, ethnicity, status, religion, or role – can be accentuated or suppressed through dress. Moreover, our comprehension of Sea Peoples’ identities becomes entangled with the identities that have traditionally been ascribed to them, based on an artificial integration of representation and reality.

I suggest that the published evidence encourages a reconsideration of the taxonomies used to identify ancient groups, particularly in relation to the use of the term “Philistine” when discussing figures wearing the “feathered” headdress (e.g. Zorn 2010, 3). My analysis recognizes that adornment was a tool in creating and maintaining group identity in the ancient world (e.g. Jones 1997). This study concludes by proposing that the “feathered” headdress was a strategy in cultural display, used to unify individuals of diverse backgrounds involved in maritime activity at the close of the Late Bronze Age (Emanuel 2013a; 2013b).

The Philistines

The Hebrew Bible remains the primary literary source for the events of the Early Iron Age (EIA) in the southern Levant (e.g. 1 Samuel 5:10; 17:52; 7:14). The Philistines

are noted within the biblical narrative as having settled in the southern coastal plain of the Levant (Philistia), at the Philistine pentapolis sites of Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza (Fig. 9.2). Their appearance followed a period of disruption throughout the eastern Mediterranean at the close of the Late Bronze Age (LBA), c. 1250–1175 BCE.

The term “Philistine” has been used in the traditional narrative to denote a people who migrated from a specific geographic location during the large-scale migration of peoples, namely from the Aegean and Cyprus (*e.g.* Faust and Lev-Tov 2011). In recent years, attention has been drawn to the limitations of this idea, with Philistine presence in the southern coastal plain now considered the result of complex intercultural relationships, and their rich material culture the outcome of contact between multiple groups (Maeir *et al.* 2013). Moreover, the relationship between material culture and ethnic identity is also contested (Verduci 2018), particularly in regards to the reliance on the pottery evidence. So-called “Philistine” pottery, or Mycenaean IIIC pottery, was manufactured across the Mediterranean, albeit with regional differences, and appears in the southern Levant at sites both with and without evidence for a Philistine presence. Inter-site variation is likewise evident for pork consumption, another feature of Philistine identity traditionally assigned to Aegean dietary traditions (Maeir *et al.* 2013).

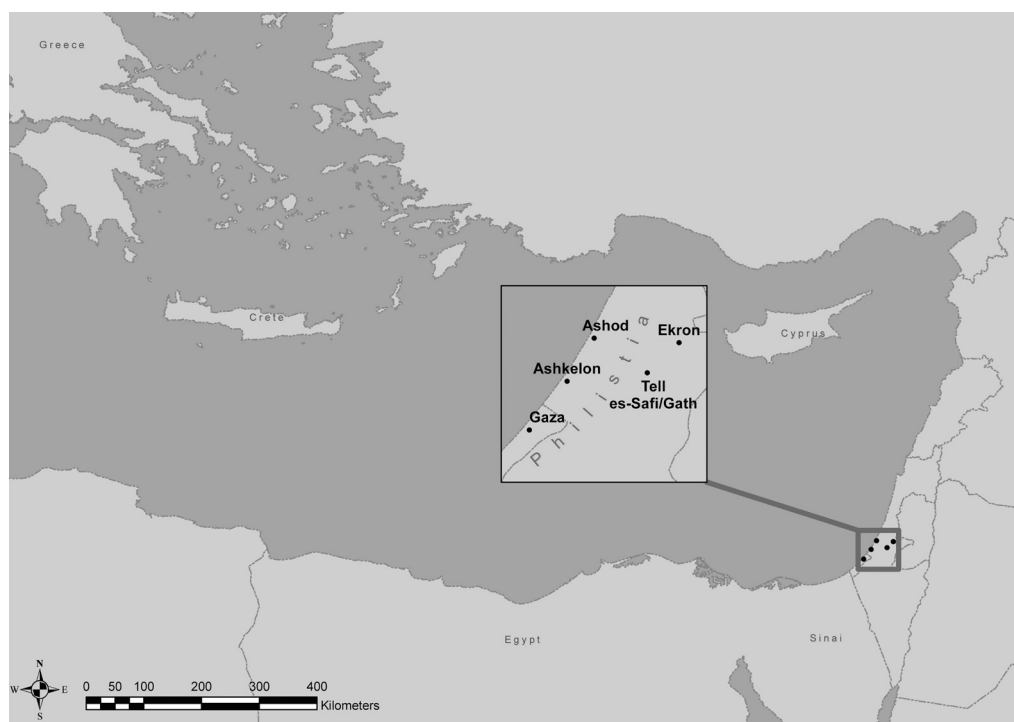


Fig. 9.2 Map of Philistia (author's own map).

In the reliefs at Medinet Habu, the figures who wear the “feathered” headdress are clean-shaven and often wear a kilt with tasselled corners. The rib-like marks on their torso are thought to represent a banded cuirass; they also hold small round shields and wield swords in one or both hands. Jacques Vanschoonwinkel (2005, 790) finds that this warrior kit has little in common with Aegean types. Rather, he finds parallels for most objects in the Near East, many of which pre-date the appearance of the Philistines in the region. The round shield, a design suited to hand-to-hand combat as is seen on Late Helladic III pottery, was perhaps introduced to the eastern Mediterranean in the 13th century BCE from Italy with the appearance of Sherden mercenaries fighting in the Egyptian army (Drews 1993). By contrast, shields in the Near East were more commonly rectangular, ovoid, or violin-shaped (Yadin 1963). According to the legendary tradition by Herodotus, the oldest Greek source for the Philistines (*Histories* I: 171), the round shield with a handle was a Carian shield and the headdress was a Lycian item (*Histories* VII: 92), both common in the region of southwest Anatolia.² Although biased to a 5th-century BCE Athenian audience, it is possible that Herodotus’ account preserves a dim recollection of Philistine appearance (Hall 2002).

Questionable taxonomies

Warriors depicted wearing “feathered” headdresses in the reliefs at Medinet Habu are most commonly described as Philistine, but in fact figures who sport this headwear are variously designated as *Denyen*, *Tjekker*, or *Peleset* within the reliefs – different groups of the Sea Peoples who, within this source and within the Papyrus Harris, are described as having originated “in their isles” (Roberts 2009). Various depicted fighting for or against the Egyptians are the *Sherden*, another group distinguished by their headgear, in this case horned helmets (Roberts 2009). The maritime conflict between the Egyptians and these groups occurred at the mouth of the Nile, and the land battle at Djahi – perhaps located along the northern Phoenician coast, or almost anywhere along the Levantine coast or even the Nile Delta (O’Connor 2013, 95). The appearance of “feathered” headwear in both the maritime battle and the land campaign does little to inform our understanding of Sea Peoples’ cultural or geographical associations.

Detailed iconographic studies of Egyptian reliefs have failed to define distinct ethnic groups for the southern Levant. Similarly, in the case of Medinet Habu, the reliefs “tend towards the generic” (Redford 2000, 3), with the Sea Peoples described in vague detail suggestive of generalities or the result of formulaic royal propaganda (O’Connor 2013). The Egyptians may have depicted all Sea Peoples in a similar fashion regardless of their origin, as was done for “Asiatics” inhabiting the Levant who all wear similar plumed headdresses. Nonetheless, that Egyptian artists were aware of some different dress customs and distinctions between groups is at times evident, with the people of Hatti depicted as clean-shaven with long hair and Canaanites sporting pointed beards and thick shoulder-length hair held back with a headband. Despite

the variance between Canaanites and people of Hatti, the Egyptians rarely presented fine distinction among peoples who were enemies or conquered, but represented clear differences between Egyptians and others. While it is possible that an artist witnessed a Philistine captive first-hand, it is more likely that his perceptions of Philistine appearance drew from established artistic conventions or even verbal accounts.

In the ancient Near East, neither does the designation of group names necessarily point to the existence of ethnic groups; for example, the term “Amorite” might simply have meant “westerner” to the Mesopotamians (Bahrani 2006, 55). Similarly, during the Neo-Assyrian period, foreigners are described as strange and barbarous, with representations of encounters with these people highlighting their otherness (Cifarelli 1998, 213). Moreover, the Assyrian word for Philistia was a geographic rather than ethnic designation (Brug 1985, 34). While it is tempting for historians to use these terms as indicating specific peoples and places, it seems likely that they represent the broader concept of alterity.

The “feathered” headdress

Unfortunately, no other 12th- to 11th-century BCE textual sources document the appearance of Philistine warriors. There is a later (Iron Age II) description of the biblical character Goliath (1 Samuel 17:5–7) that in no way matches the appearance of the Sea Peoples warriors; instead, it consists of an odd pastiche of weaponry and armour from different periods (Finkelstein 2002, 142–148). Moreover, the Goliath narrative can be attributed to a date somewhere in the 6th century BCE or even later, some 500 years after the events it recounts, if in fact the narrative were accepted as being accurate (Millard 2009); however, like Herodotus’ account, the narrative possibly preserves some authentic recollections of the Philistine warrior kit.

Southern Levant

Evidence for “feathered” headwear in the Levant is found on scarabs from Beth Shean (James 1966, fig. 117.4; pl. 6.2:1), Akzhib (Keel and Uehlinger 1997, 50, no. 90), and Tell el-Far’ah South (Far’ah), dated c. 1250–1175 BCE and thus contemporary with or even predating the Sea Peoples depictions at Medinet Habu (for references, see Yasur-Landau 2010, 210–211). Somewhat crude representations of similar headwear appear on ivory pendants from Tomb 201 at Far’ah, dating to the early 10th century BCE (McClellan 1979), and on other Levantine and Hittite images (*e.g.* Loud 1939, pl. 4.2b; Pritchard 1943, fig. 6; *Biblical Archaeologist* 1981, cover, 131; MacQueen 1986, fig. 61). In EIA levels at Kinrot, north of the Sea of Galilee, the head of a male figurine includes deep incisions that may have served as fittings for straw or feathers in the manner of the headdresses depicted at Medinet Habu (Münger *et al.* 2011, fig. 23).

The introduction of anthropoid sarcophagi lids in the southern Levant during the 13th century BCE includes examples from Beth Shean with human heads that sport

ornamental bands at their foreheads, some with a “feathered” feature resembling those from Medinet Habu (Rowe 1930, 39, pls 37–40) (Fig. 9.3). The variety of bands, decorated with dots, chevrons, or zigzags, were a key factor in interpreting the headdresses as indicators of rank and/or tribe (Dothan 1982, 274, no. 21). While most scholars interpret these clay coffins as a purely Egyptian-style burial custom closely associated with Egyptian activities in Canaan and predating Philistine presence (see *e.g.* Gonen 1992, 29), the use of anthropoid coffins in Far’ah Cemetery 500 dates to the period after Egyptian influence at the site, casting doubt on such arguments (*cf.* Yasur-Landau 2010, 208). The fact that no anthropoid coffins were found at Philistine pentapolis sites does not exclude the possibility that those depicted with headdresses belonged to members of the Sea Peoples, perhaps stationed at Egyptian garrisons, who were subsequently provided with Egyptian burial coffins (Oren 1973, 149).

Within Philistia itself, the only possible evidence for “feathered” headgear comes from a rare late 12th or early 11th century BCE locally-made bichrome krater from Ashkelon that is decorated with Minoan, Aegean, and Cypriote elements (Stager and Mountjoy 2007, 59) (Fig. 9.4). On one side, a figure wearing a headdress and holding a round shield confronts a dolphin; on the other, a figure with a similar headdress rides on what appears to be a chariot (Stager and Mountjoy 2007, 54–55, figs 3, 4). Such headwear is comparable to Aegean “hedgehog” helmets, a form of baggy headwear with a bristled crest conceivably formed from a perishable material such as animal

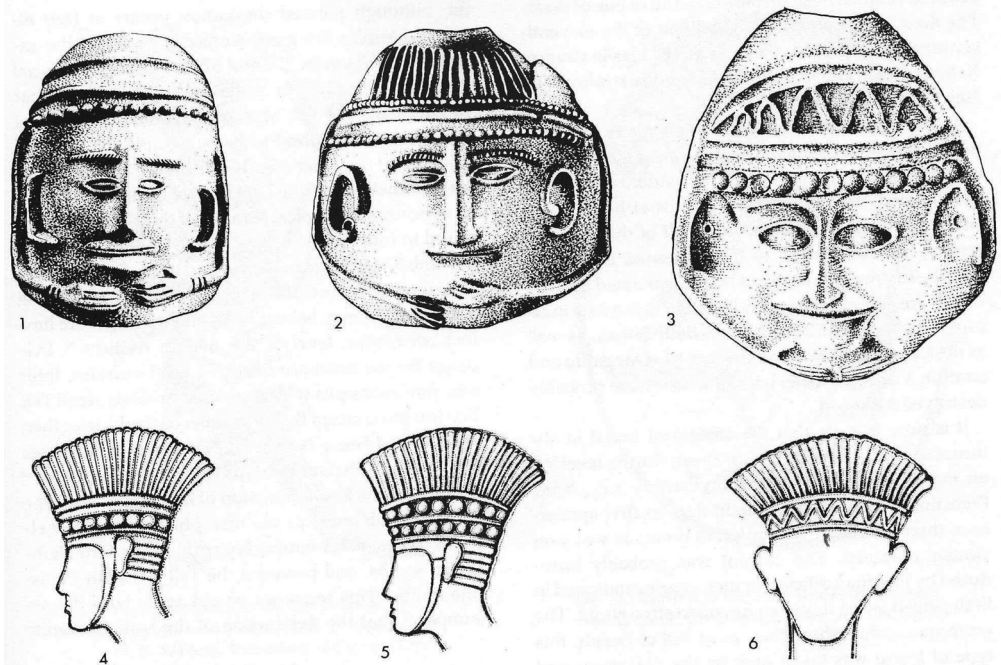


Fig. 9.3 Anthropoid sarcophagi lids, Tombs 90 and 66, Beth Shean and headdress detail from Medinet Habu (Dothan 1982, fig. 11. Courtesy of Trude Dothan and the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem).

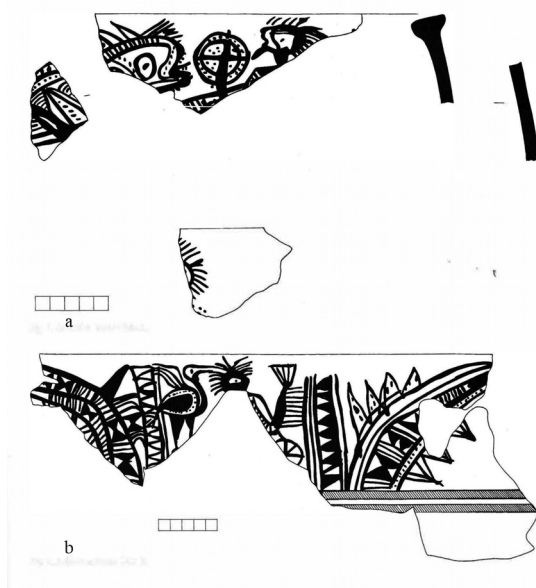


Fig. 9.4 Fragments of sides A and B of bichrome krater, Ashkelon (Stager and Mountjoy 2007, a. (dolphin side) fig. 3, and b. (chariot side) fig. 4. Courtesy of Penelope Mountjoy).

The “hedgehog” helmet appears on sherds from Tiryns, some worn by warriors bearing small round shields (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982, XI.51, XI.59). On one krater fragment from Kalapodi, dated to 1130–1070 BCE, a warrior wearing a helmet with small tufts or bristles brandishes what appears to be a Naue II sword (Whitley *et al.* 2007, fig. 51). A similar helmet, although it has also been described as a headdress “crested with feathers”, appears on depictions of maritime warriors on several sherds from Seraglio on Kos in the Dodecanese (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982, 160–61, nos. 29–33).

Side A of the “Warrior Vase” from Mycenae depicts warriors wearing horned helmets, similar to those of the Sherden from Medinet Habu, while side B depicts a helmet with a short crest or bristled surface (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982, XI.42) (Fig. 9.5). Both of the helmet types depicted on the vase are covered by white dots, which can be interpreted as studs. There is also a “hedgehog” helmet depicted with cheek guards, a low crest, and decorative studs depicted on pottery fragments from Voudeni near Patras (Moschos 2009, 358). It is plausible that bands decorated with circles or dots at the base of “feathered” headdresses might represent similar studded features. In some cases, decorative bands at the base of these “hedgehog” helmets resemble the decorative bands visible at the base of “feathered” headdresses at Medinet Habu.

A warrior helmet with a lower band decorated in dots, or perhaps studs, appears on a sherd from Lefkandi (possibly LH IIIC but not well stratified) (Evely *et al.* 2006, 240, pl. 60. B3, 250). Another fragment from Mycenae depicts a helmet with a chevron-decorated band like those depicted at Medinet Habu (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982,

skin, possibly hedgehog (Stager and Mountjoy 2007, 53). It is likely that at least some Aegean bristled helmets were made of perishable materials, given that metal helmets were rare in the Mycenaean period (Snodgrass 1967, 23, 26, 30–32). Alternatively, the “hedgehog” style might be a stylized representation of a headdress with a spray of feathers or other upright material attached to it.

Aegean and West Anatolia

Simple renderings on Late Helladic (LH) IIIC pottery (c. 1200 BCE) of the “hedgehog” variety of helmet on warriors often appear in combination with military paraphernalia such as Naue II swords or round shields (Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982).

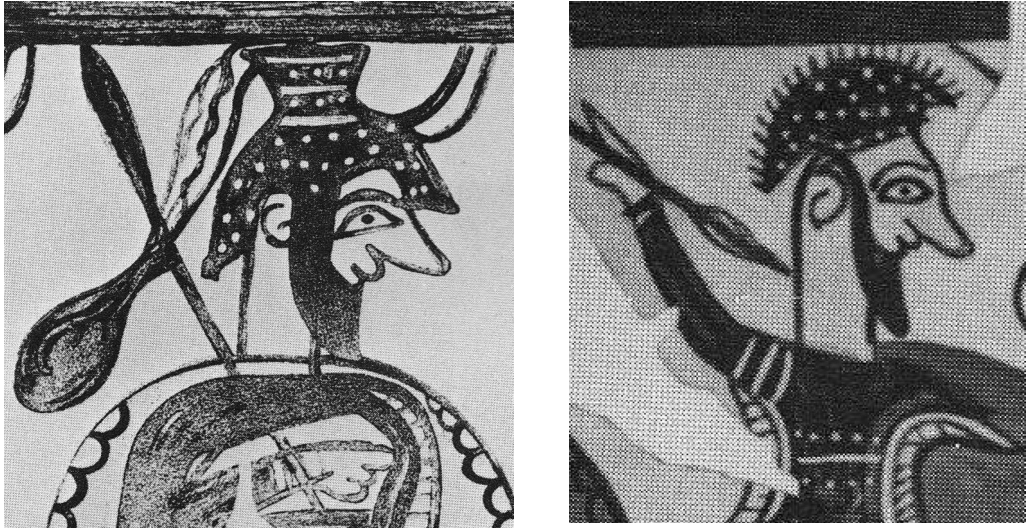


Fig. 9.5 Warrior Vase sides A and B, Mycenae (after Vermeule and Karageorghis 1982, XI.42).

pl. XL.47). Meanwhile, a krater from Bademgediği Tepe on the west coast of Anatolia depicts seafaring warriors who wear bristled helmets with a zigzag decoration on the band at their base (Fig. 9.6). The helmet is more detailed than is found in most Aegean depictions, and more closely resembles the “feathered” headdress of the Sea Peoples. This sherd is dated to transitional LH IIIB2–IIIC or LH IIIC Early, making it the earliest representation of this headdress in the Aegean–West Anatolian interface, and it corresponds to the known presence of Sea Peoples in the region (Mountjoy 2005, 425). If the headgear worn by these warriors are in fact “feathered” headdresses – or an “East Aegean version of the ‘hedgehog’ helmet” as Mountjoy states (2005, 426) – it is possible that they represent Sea Peoples, rather than Mycenaean as previously thought. Furthermore, “they certainly introduce sufficient doubt to necessitate a reconsideration of the ethnic identity of all the other ship representations ‘of Aegean tradition’” (Wachsmann 1981, 213). On comparison with the Koan sherds and perhaps other sherds depicting helmets, Mountjoy suggests that these too should be re-dated to LH IIIB2–IIIC or LH IIIC Early. A Naue II sword found in a LH IIIB context at Seraglio might lend support to such an argument (Vitale 2009, 1236).

Cyprus

Shifting the focus to Cyprus, a “feathered” headdress with a decorative band and rear head support, along with a panelled kilt reminiscent of those depicted on the Sea Peoples, is worn by a chariot-riding figure on a Late Cypriot (LC) IIIA (c. 1200 BCE) gaming box from Enkomi (Murray *et al.* 1900, pl. I, fig. 19) (Fig. 9.7). A captive *Tjekker* depicted at Medinet Habu wears a similar chevron-patterned headdress (Breasted

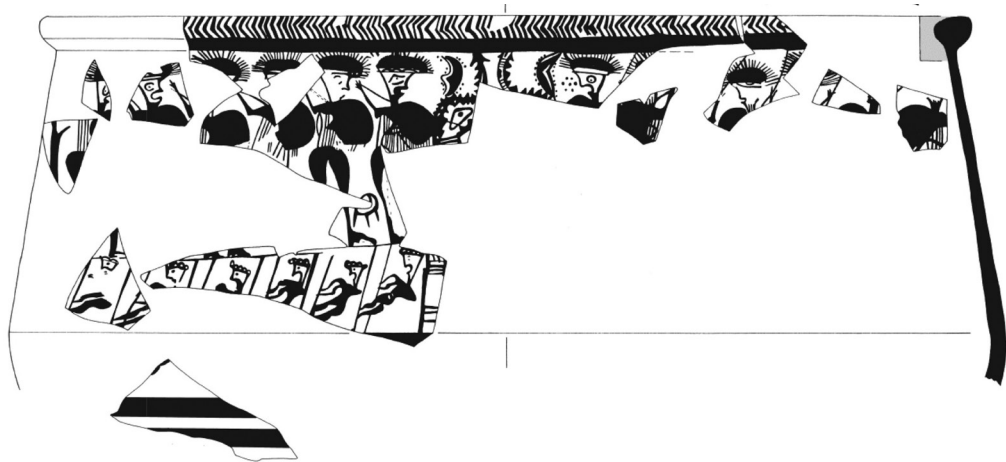


Fig. 9.6 Fragment, Bademgediği Tepe, Turkey (Mountjoy 2005, pl. 96. Courtesy of Penelope Mountjoy).

1930, pl. 43, top row) suggesting that the gaming box figure is *Tjeker*, rather than Philistine (Wainwright 1963).

A kneeling warrior wearing a feathered headdress and holding a round shield depicted on a conical stone seal from Enkomi furnishes additional evidence for a foreign presence on Cyprus (Fig. 9.8). The seal was found below the floor of a building associated with the reoccupation of the site following an episode of destruction in LC IIIA, in levels once attributed to a Sea Peoples presence on Cyprus (Dikaios 1969–1971, II, 488, 529; cf. Knapp 2008, 366). The dates of both these images are contemporary with the portrayal of the Sea Peoples at Medinet Habu, implying a regional familiarity with their adornment practices.

Other elements of Sea Peoples costume and weaponry occur on ivory mirror handles. A small round shield is associated with a “griffin-slayer” on an example from Enkomi Tomb 17. The figure, bearing a round shield, wears a ribbed or banded corselet similar to those of the Sea Peoples. A similar round shield is associated with the “lion-slayer” on another handle from Kouklia Evreti Tomb 8 (Catling 1964, 51, pl. 1: C). The “griffin-slayer” also wears a short helmet, which although shown without “feathers”, includes a decoratively studded band (Wainwright 1963, 147).

Portes helmet

Returning to the Aegean mainland, burials from LH IIIC Achaea in the cemeteries of Kalithea, Patras, and Portes were accompanied by Naue II swords, other weapons, and armour, including bronze helmets (Kolonas 2001; Moschos 2009, 356). This region may provide the most convincing evidence for headwear similar to those depicted on the Sea Peoples. At Portes, a chamber tomb contained the burial of a warrior in his armour, with weapons including a Naue II sword and a crushed bronze headdress with



Fig. 9.7 Detail of ivory gaming box, Enkomi, Cyprus (British Museum Inv. no. 1894,0401.996, Courtesy of The Trustees of The British Museum).



Fig. 9.8 Headdress on sealing (after Pini 1989, CMS VII No. 129, fig. 5).

its inner lining partially preserved (Kolonas 2001) (Fig. 9.9). Following restoration, it took the form of a tall elliptical cylinder with an outer surface decoratively highlighted by horizontal metal strips alternating with rows of studs (Papadopoulos 1999, pl. LIXb). The composition of a helmet's lower portion using metal strips is mentioned in *Iliad* Λ 373, which also notes that this type of headwear could not stay in place without an inner support of rawhide, although in the case of the Portes helmet, there was an inner bed of woven straw (Moschos 2009, 358).³

The Portes helmet has a very close parallel in the bronze cylindrical object found in the tholos tomb at Praisos-Foutoula in Crete; this object



Fig. 9.9 Portes helmet, Greece (Moschos 2009, fig. 1.b. Courtesy of Ioannis Moschos).

from Lakkithra in Cephalonia (Marinatos 1932, 39, pl. 16α) and a Mycenaean warrior burial at Krini (Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1994), while bronze sheet bands from Phaistos and Mycenae, which were categorized as belts, corselets, or diadems, might also be misidentified elements of headgear (Moschos 2009, 358).

According to the excavator of the Portes helmet, its unique shape and decorative elements, combined with the fact it was open at the top, reducing its protective attributes, meant that its purpose was more likely ceremonial or to demonstrate a position of rank (*i.e.* a headdress rather than a functioning helmet; see Moschos 2009, 358, n. 6). This aligns with Dothan's suggestion that the decorative elements on the lower band depicted on anthropoid sarcophagi might represent different ranks or tribes (Dothan 1982, 13). Decorative features should be considered in light of other talismanic devices used in the Mycenaean world. For example, amber beads decorated Mycenaean

sword belts for what may be supernatural reasons, protecting the wearer rather than purely functioning as adornment – in effect making the object a weapon too (Maran 2013).

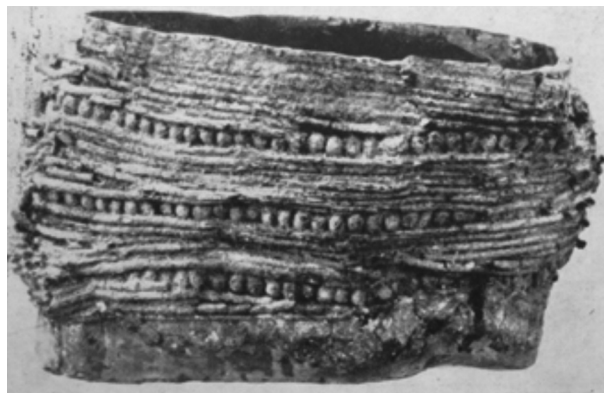


Fig. 9.10 Object from Praisos-Foutoula, Crete (after Platon 1960, pl. 241β).

is also formed of bands alternately decorated with ribs and rows of bosses (Platon 1960, 304–305, pl. 241β) (Fig. 9.10). Comparisons can also be drawn with bronze strips and small bronze studs found at Kallithea-Spenzes, which may well be the remains of a warrior's helmet, rather than a corselet or a scabbard as first thought (Moschos 2009, 256). Drawing on the construction of the helmet found in Portes, these remains too might once have fastened to perishable material inside the headgear. Similar elements come

Italy

Farther afield, a Nuragic bronze figurine known as the “Archer of Orantes” from Usellus in Italy wears a banded cap with a row of rivets and a central bird-like protome, as well as

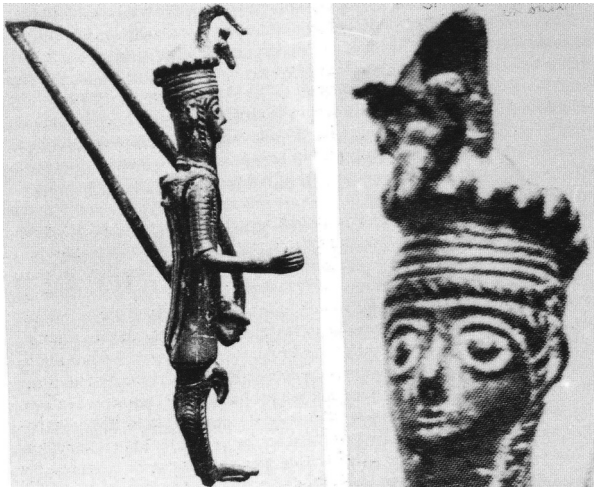


Fig. 9.11 Archer of Orantes, Usellus, Italy (Lo Schiavo 1994, pl. I.a–b. Courtesy of Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki S.r.l.).

a banded corselet reminiscent of those shown in the Medinet Habu reliefs (Lo Schiavo 1994, pl. I.a–b) (Fig. 9.11). The chronology of Nuragic bronzes remains complicated due to the absence of closed contexts, although the figurine is placed somewhere within LBA–EIA (Lo Schiavo 1994, 80). If the bird head ornaments on Sea Peoples’ ships device (common also in Mycenaean LH IIIB ship depictions) points to Sea Peoples’ central European origins as has been argued (Wachsmann 1998, 178–97), then the similar bird head protome on

the helmet of the “Archer of Orantes” offers intriguing evidence for a link between headwear adornment and the maritime traditions of the Sea Peoples.

Also from Sardinia comes the head of a bronze warrior figurine found at Decimoputzu, which wears a headdress that has geometric markings on its band, with vertical strips above (Borchhardt 1972, pl. 16.5). Although the headwear appears quite rigid, its similarity to the Sea Peoples’ “feathered” headdress is clear. A similar headdress occurs on a late Mycenaean krater from Damascus, dated to 1375–1300 BCE (Borchhardt 1972, pl. 16.4). Parallels between Sardinia and the Levant are not limited to these examples, with fragments of an anthropoid vessel from Guspini near the Gulf of Oristano supporting the relationship of this type of vessel with groups active in the Mediterranean (Bernadini 2010, fig. 15). Such interconnectivity is unsurprising when one considers existing networks of mobility at the end of the LH IIIB, as is indicated by the exchange of pottery between Sardinia and Cyprus, the presence of Sardinian pottery on Crete, and the import of copper oxide ingots from Cyprus to Sardinia (Lo Schiavo 2003).

Summary and conclusion

This study is a contribution to the on-going discussion of ethnicity and identity in the southern coastal plain during the EIA. Specifically, it highlights inherent problems with certain taxonomies, such as “Philistine”. The “feathered” headdress has been categorized as indicative of a single ethnic group – the Philistines – and scholars use the presence of this headdress as confirmation that an ethnic group existed in a geographic region. Thus, the “Philistine feathered headdress” becomes

an accepted notion, despite the fact that it cannot be classified as Philistine based on other criteria.

That the headdress, kilt, short hair, and clean-shaven chin were parts of some kind of uniform in an era prior to permanent standing armies seems unlikely (for an alternative view that it might be linked to some form of initiation, see Yasur-Landau 2010, 178). More likely, the artists at Medinet Habu stereotyped the Sea Peoples' appearance. These warriors were amongst a mixed seafaring group who carried armour and weapons that were their own personal possessions, and as such were influenced not only by their cultural preferences but by those with whom they came into contact.

The similarity of the Portes headdress and the headdress of the Sea Peoples offers interesting new avenues of inquiry. I would contend, however, that while headdresses are indeed indicative of strong Aegean and Mycenaean influence, they remain inconclusive as evidence for the extent of the role played by Aegean peoples in the formation of the Sea Peoples culture. It may be that the warrior burials currently limited to Achaea await discovery at powerful centres such as Mycenae and Tiryns in the Argolid, as iconography on kraters and hoards containing Naue II swords would indicate (Deger-Jalkotzy 2006, 168).

I propose, in conclusion, that those who abandoned their cities during the period of unrest at the end of the LBA to travel amongst the Mediterranean ports with their ships and weapons – no doubt of the same origin as those that chose a land route (Yasur-Landau 2013) – joined a contingent drawn from Anatolia, the Dodecanese, the Aegean, and Italy. These were a people linked to maritime activity who wore a headdress with a long tradition as an item of prestigious adornment – not as a uniform, but as a symbol with a widespread regional and temporal affiliation to maritime traditions that was able to loosely unite disparate groups, particularly at the LBA/EIA juncture.

Notes

- 1 This paper draws on a paper presented at the 2013 American Schools of Oriental Research Annual Meeting (ASOR) in Baltimore. I was honoured to receive the 2014 Sean W. Dever Memorial Prize for this paper and thank the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, ASOR, and Professor William G. and Mrs. Norma Dever. My travel to Baltimore was made possible by a Graduate Research Arts Travel Scheme award and a Research Assistance Grant awarded by the University of Melbourne. I am indebted to the many Australian and international colleagues who have contributed helpful suggestions and who have my sincere thanks. I am particularly grateful to Professor Megan Cifarelli for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this volume and for giving generously of her time.
- 2 Despite the dubious historical reliability of such an account written for a 5th-century Athenian audience, Herodotus remains an important source for historical events in the region.
- 3 As to the veracity of Greek texts, one should keep in mind that Homer (*Iliad* X 261) recounted with some accuracy the boar's tusk helmets of the Mycenaeans, despite the fact that he was describing events of the distant past.

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Chapter 10

Some observations on fringe in Elamite dress

Trudy S. Kawami

Abstract

Garments with fringed hems or flounced skirts are well attested in ancient Mesopotamia and appear sporadically in Elamite art of the later 3rd millennium BCE. By the later 2nd millennium, however, certain elite females in both the highland and lowland regions of Elam are shown wearing distinctive floor-length skirts with multiple bands of undulating fringe or lappets. These fringed skirts were not worn by male figures. The women wearing these skirts may be associated with water through placement adjacent to water features or by accompanying imagery. Later versions of these skirts appear on female figurines excavated from tombs dated to the late 7th–early 6th century BCE. To judge from the location and the tomb furnishing, the elite women buried there had a significant religious role associated with water. This association has so far not been attested in the written documents. Voluminous fringed skirts only appear on images of two elite males in the early 6th century BCE raising the possibility that female religious garb was appropriated by males in a time of political uncertainty in Elam.¹

Introduction

Ancient Elam was a region in southwestern Iran populated by people who spoke the Elamite language. The area encompasses two geographical zones: the lowlands of modern Khuzistan province which meld into Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), and the uplands or highlands of the Zagros Mountains to the north and east that include the modern provinces of Ilam, Luristan, and Fars (Petrie *et al.* 2018; Zadok 2018, 146–147) (Fig. 10.1). The ruling centre for the lowlands seems to have been Susa; the highlands center was Anshan, now identified with the site of Tal-e Malyan near Persepolis (Potts 2016, 11, 72–77). Various paramount rulers titled themselves “king of Anshan and

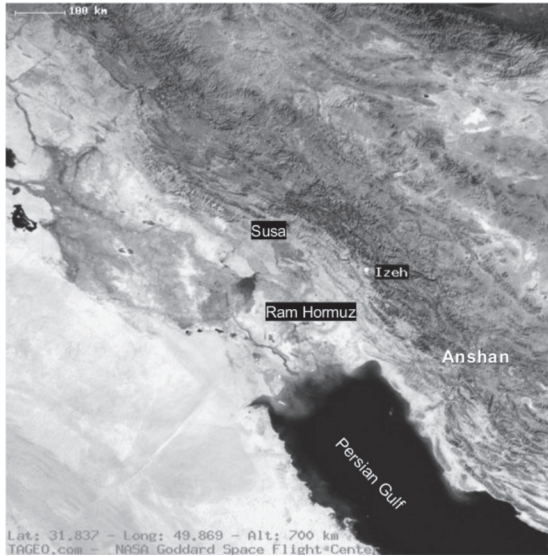


Fig. 10.1 Map of Southwestern Iran with sites mentioned in the text (satellite photo courtesy of Godard Space Flight Center, NASA).

Susa” though at other times it was “Susa and Anshsan”. The written documents of Elam are varied but extremely incomplete, especially when contrasted with those of Mesopotamia (Malbran-Labat 2018). Few historical accounts, chronicles, or religious tracts have been found so far (Basello and Ascalone 2018, 698–699). We do not understand how power was exercised nor how it passed from generation to generation. We know relatively little about Elamite political structure or spiritual beliefs compared to Mesopotamia (Quintana 2018). Thus the archaeological and art historical record is paramount to our comprehension of Elamite culture as a whole.

Relatively little has been written about Elamite dress (Álvarez-Mon 2009; 2010; Kawami 2018), despite the fact that clothing reflects a person’s identity related to age, ethnicity, gender role, status, and religion (Van Pool *et al.* 2017, 262–263). A consideration of the role of clothing in Elam thus may be useful in revealing aspects of Elamite culture, belief, and politics that are not part of the written record. This study will look at fringe, a ubiquitous aspect of woven cloth since at least the Neolithic period (Barber 1991, 10, 30, 196, 258), as one indicator of political, religious, and social roles in Elamite culture.

Since we do not have the actual cloth to examine, we must keep in mind as we look at two- and three-dimensional representations of fringe that artistic conventions may not always distinguish between actual fringe, lappets, flounces, and applied ribbons. Thus all will here be considered as “fringe” for they are all narrow, vertical, free-hanging elements that swing as the fabric moves.

Late 4th and 3rd millennia BCE

The earliest depiction of fringe occurs about 3000 BCE on an unprovenanced silver bovid kneeling in a human posture and wearing a striped garment with a narrow fringed edge and a tasseled corner.² Otherwise little detailed information about Elamite dress and textiles exists for this early period.

By the second half of the 3rd millennium representations of Mesopotamian-style dress occur in Elamite art, reflecting the powerful influences of Mesopotamia in

political, cultural, and religious sectors of Elamite life. Skirts heavy with rows of flounces or with fringed hems are worn by both deities and worshippers (Kawami 2018, 675). A stone sculpture of the Elamite Goddess Narunde (Fig. 10.2), executed in the reign of the ruler Puzur-Inshushnak, a contemporary of Gudea of Lagash and Ur-Namma of Ur (c. 2100 BCE) (Steinkeller 2018, 191–193) displays a garment typical of Mesopotamian deities. Although this dress is often called a *kaunakes* (Álvarez-Mon 2018, 609), a Greek word meaning a sheep's fleece, it is clearly not that, but a constructed garment enhanced with rows of rounded lappets or perhaps trimmed segments of fringe. The skirt of this garment has four broad rows of rounded fringe, notable for their softly curving forms and gently wavy interior lines suggesting movement though the wearer is still. This depiction of a fringed garment underscores the impact of cultural and religious influence from Mesopotamia.

The images of Puzur-Inshushnak himself show the same Mesopotamian influence (Fig. 10.3). He is depicted clad in a smoothly wrapped robe like that worn by the contemporaneous Akkadian rulers of Mesopotamia whom he had recently driven out of the Elamite lowlands. His garment even features the same complex knotted or beaded fringe along one vertical edge like that on the sculptures of the Akkadian ruler Manishtusu (Moortgat 1969, pls 141, 142, 149; see also Eppiheimer 2019). In this case, a particular type of fringe is used to signify continuity of power though one political authority has been replaced by another.

An inscribed silver beaker, a random find from the Marv Dasht basin (Fig. 10.4), illustrates influence from the east rather than the west in Elamite dress. The

beaker shows female figures (whether deities or worshippers – it is not clear) wearing voluminous garments with an overall pattern of diamond-shaped fringe (Potts 2008, 180–186). These garments appear to have sleeves, a feature not documented earlier in Iran or Mesopotamia, as well as a trailing hem that extends behind the wearer. This unusual garment is well known in the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) of southern Central Asia and eastern Iran. Daniel Potts' argument (2008, 187) that the beaker was made in the BMAC culture and only inscribed after it had been taken to Elam solves some of the puzzling aspects of these distinctive garments.



Fig. 10.2 Susa. Statue of the goddess Narunde. Musée du Louvre, acc. no. Sb 12 (Photo: Franck Raux/Art Resource, NY).

2nd millennium BCE

By the earlier 2nd millennium BCE distinctly Elamite elements of dress may be discerned. Unfortunately, representations of garments from

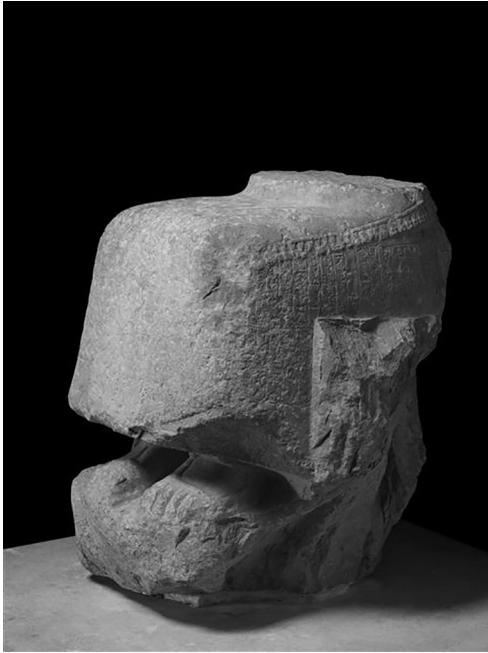


Fig. 10.3 Susa. Fragmentary statue of Puzur-Inshushinak. Musée du Louvre, acc. no. Sb55 (Photo: Franck Raux. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY).



Fig. 10.4 Marv Dasht silver beaker (Photo: © Ancient Art and Architecture / Alamy Stock Photo)

the earlier part of the millennium occur on either tiny engraved cylinder seals or worn rock reliefs. Neither medium yields detailed information, limiting our understanding of dress in that time. The most distinctive development seems to be the adoption by the ruling male elite of headgear with a prominent pointed visor (Kawami 2018, 678). Only in the later part of the 2nd millennium are definitively Elamite modes of dress clearly established. Elite males wear relatively short skirts or kilts with a smooth surface and a flaring hem that reveals not only their feet, but often their entire lower legs. One cannot determine the physical nature of the flaring hem, if it is a stiff fringe, an applied band, or something else entirely (Kawami 2018, 681, 685). Elite females in both lowland and upland Elam wear long garments with multiple horizontal layers of fringe and/or lappets that cover their feet. Their arms are often bare.

The lowlands

The bronze statue of Queen Napirasu (Plate 10.1), wife of Untash-Napirisha, “king of Anshan and Susa”, and possibly daughter of the Kassite king Burnaburriash II (Potts 2016, 176, 19, 212, 205; Wicks 2015, 30) provides a detailed illustration of the dress of a woman of the highest rank in the 14th century BCE. She stands with folded hands, a columnar figure in a short-sleeved bodice with a long skirt whose wide hem of

undulating fringe reaches the ground. The fabric of this skirt is covered with a regular pattern of small dots. A second band of fringe even longer than the hem falls from the waist, wrapping around the queen's rear and sides but not covering the front of the skirt. This fringe hangs straight in contrast to the gentle S-curves of the hem fringe. A vertical panel on the front of the skirt appears to be folded over at the waist with a long, tapering segment of straight fringe visible on the proper right.³ It appears that the garment is comprised of several parts that are worn wrapped over each other. The great bronze may present in a more detailed way the long skirts with rows of fringe worn by royal women on a stone stele of Napirasu's husband, Untash-Napirisha also excavated at Susa (Fig. 10.5). Because the figures are inscribed, we know that the two women on the stele are Napirasu, on the viewer's left, and the priestess U-tik – identified as Untash-Napirisha's mother (Mofidi-Nasrabadi 2018a, 245; Potts 2016, 213) – on the viewer's right. Both women have the same posture and wear a similar garment bearing a fine all-over pattern of dots and having wide bands of fringe at both hip and hem. The chief distinction between the dress of the two women is that Napirasu's fringed hem undulates, but U-tik's does not. The wavy fringe echoes the aqueous motifs of the stele as a whole, especially the watery goddesses bearing flowing vases just below the register with the ruler, his wife, and his mother. Napirasu's great bronze also presents formal parallels with the fountain goddess from Mari (Moortgat 1969, pls. 214, 215; Akkermans and Schwartz 2003, 315–317), a theme with a long and rich history in the ancient Near East (Ataç 2018, 44–45, 59–61).



Fig. 10.5 Susa. Untash-Napirisha stele. 14th century BCE. Musée du Louvre, acc. no. Sb 12 (Photo: Franck Raux. © RMN-Grand Palais/ Art Resource, NY).

Several variations on Napirasu's garb are known in Elamite art. A faience figurine (Fig. 10.6) with similar posture and dress was excavated at Choga Zambil, an unusual site with a Mesopotamian-style ziggurat, built by Untash-Napirisha southeast of Susa (Mofidi-Nasrabadi 2018a, 241–242; Mofidi-Nasrabadi 2018b, 512–516; Potts 2016, 214–223). The garment depicted has a dotted ground, an elaborate frontal panel on the skirt, and a band of decoration around the hem. It does not, however, have fringe around the waist. The parallels with the Napirasu bronze are certainly intentional as the bronze statue was originally installed at Choga Zambil and only moved to Susa later (Bridey 2018, 558–559).

Another variation on the fringed skirt is found on some female figurines excavated at Susa (Fig. 10.7). They stand in the same posture as Napirasu with hands clasped in front and



Fig. 10.6 Choga Zanbil. Faience (?) female figurine. Musée du Louvre, acc. no. Sb 5089 (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY).



1165

Fig. 10.7 A. Figurine from Susa. (© National Museum of Iran). B. Figurine from Susa. Louvre acc. no. 7478 (Musée du Louvre).

wear elaborate garments with a dotted ground (Spycket 1992, 183–186, pl. 132). Their skirts have bands or tiers with borders of rounded lappets, or short fringe cut in scallops. One band encircles the waist and another band marks the hem. The edges of the third or middle band cross in the centre of the skirt to form a slightly curving, inverted V. Whether this skirt comprises a series of textiles wrapped over each other or is a single piece with applied embellishments is unclear. It would be naïve to expect clothing, even clothing with a religious aspect, to remain totally unchanged in construction over centuries. The precise date of the Susa figurines is unclear, though they clearly fall in the latter half of the 2nd millennium.

The highlands

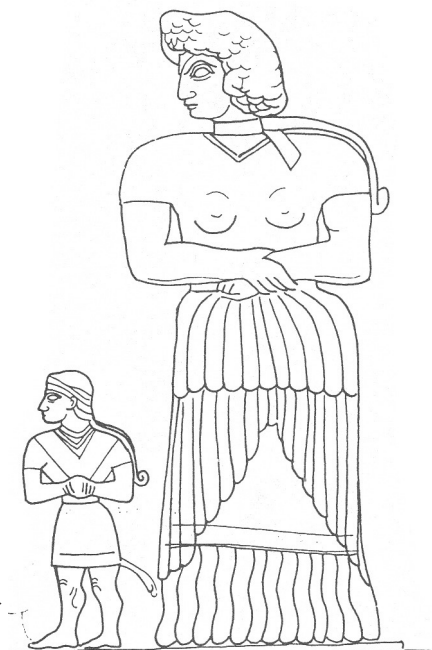
The 12th-century BCE rock reliefs at Shikāft-e Salman near Izeh (Eamite Ayapir) give us images of sumptuously garbed elite women in the Elamite highlands (Overlaet 2011, 112–113). Potts (2016, 296, 299–300) dates all the reliefs at Shikāft-e Salman to the 1st millennium BCE on the basis of inscriptions. It is now clear, however, that these inscriptions were added by a later ruler, Hanni, well after the reliefs were cut (Gorris and Wicks 2018, 265; Overlaet 2011, 112). Carved adjacent to a dramatic seasonal waterfall, the reliefs show what appear to be family groups facing the falls as if approaching in worship. There are two “family” panels in the grotto, but only Relief II (Fig. 10.8) retains sufficient details of dress. It depicts a standing male and

female flanking a small child. The heads are in profile to the viewer's left and their torsos are depicted frontally, the hands clasped at the waist. The male wears a short kilt with a flaring hem and visored headgear. The female wears a long skirt that covers her feet and is ornamented with three wide bands of long fringe or lappets. One band encircles her waist, and the hem features distinctly wavy fringe falling from a horizontal band. The middle tier of fringe falls in an inverted V on the front of the skirt. The arrangement evokes but does not duplicate the dress of the Susa figurines, a relationship noted by Agnes Spycket (1992, 184).

The elaborate dress of elite Elamite women in the latter half of the 2nd millennium BCE features floor-length skirts having multiple bands of fringe, including one around the waist. The exact social and/or religious status of these elite women is difficult to determine as, unlike Queen Napirasu, most images do not carry identifying inscriptions. From the sparse documents that we have it appears that priests and priestesses were both able to manage temples and other divine assets, and that priestesses could marry and have children (Quintana 2018, 733). As for non-priestly officials, like the *puhu-teppu* Ginadu who was buried at Haft Tepe (ancient Kabnak), we know that she was an official of Tepti-ahar, "king of Susa and Anshan" but we do not know what duties that office entailed (Mofidi-Nasrabadi 2011). Quite likely women carried out numerous important functions about which we are now ignorant. The association of certain female figures with water, whether the vase-bearing goddesses of the Untash-Napirisha stele or the dramatic waterfall of Shikaft-e Salman, suggests



Fig. 10.8 Izeh valley, Shikaft-e Salman, relief panel II. 12th century BCE (photo courtesy of Amir Karimi; drawing by Erik Smekens, Belgian Archaeological Mission in Iran courtesy of Dr. Bruno Overlaet).



a specific religious or cultic role for these women. It is notable that they are shown in the reliefs as equal in height to the male rulers.

Possibly they held a reciprocal relationship to the male rulers and were in some way essential to male legitimacy or authority.⁴

Earlier 1st millennium BCE

Our information regarding the garb of elite women in the earlier half of the 1st millennium BCE is limited, but recent archaeological finds have expanded our understanding. Road-building activity at Joubji (Jubaiji) near the town of Ram Hormuz in lowland Khuzistan accidentally uncovered a tomb containing the graves of at least two elite women, assumed to be priestesses, buried in a lavishly appointed tomb. Located in the bordering zone between the lowlands and the highlands, the tombs are on the southern bank of an important watercourse, the 'Ala River. This river rises in the Zagros Mountains and flows southwest through a dramatic cut in the mountain wall forming a broad alluvial fan on the Ram Hormuz plain (Alizadeh 2014, 240–241, 291, pl. 51). Among the rich furnishings of the tombs are two shallow pans with long handles, as well as fragments of perhaps three others, each decorated by a cast figure of a seated woman with extended hands riveted at the juncture of the pan and its handle (Shishegar 2015; Wicks 2015, 27–30; Bridey 2018, 562–563; Wicks forthcoming). At least one pan is silver, not bronze (Wicks forthcoming, Fig. 1c) (Fig. 10.9). Each figure wears a garment comprising a short-sleeved bodice covered with dots or circles like that of Queen Napirasu, and a skirt that cascades in tiers of undulating fringe with rounded ends. Most surprisingly the body of a fish complete with dorsal and caudal fins extends from the back of the seated figure along the handle of the pan. Five more fish-ladies, four with long-fringed skirts, survive without their accompanying pans. Dated to the late 7th or early 6th century BCE, the Joubji figures are excavated counterparts to a puzzling example that has been in the British Museum for over 50 years (Plate 10.2).

On first observation, the little figures appear neither wholly human – having a fish body as well, nor obviously divine – lacking the horned headgear that usually identifies a deity. But there may be a middle ground between these two identities. The figures may represent human individuals who embody the divine, or at least the supra-natural, in their social function. Some of the seated bronze figures wear wide necklaces of elongated diamond-shaped pendants. Elements of such a necklace were excavated in one of the tombs (Shishegar 2015, nos. 11/2, 11/3, unnumbered colour plate; Wicks forthcoming, fig. 6c). These necklaces suggest that the deceased themselves shared some supra-natural aspects with the cast figures. The placement of the tombs near the river, the fish-bodies of the seated figures, and their heavily fringed skirts indicate that in some way the women buried with the necklaces and the figurines that resembled them, both embodied elements of water, life, and of course death (Wicks 2015, 99–100). This confluence of themes with the correlating motif of



Fig. 10.9 Joubji. Bronze pan with cast bronze female figure (photos after Shishegar 2015, unnumbered colour plate and p. 373).

fertility has a long history in the cultures of Iran (Overlaet 2011). Another bronze figure from the Joubji tomb depicts a standing woman with clasped hands wearing the same long, fringe-covered skirt and wide necklace of diamond-shaped pendants as worn by the seated figures (Helwing 2017, nos. 106, 252–253, 272). Her standing posture and lack of a fish “tail” distinguish her from the seated figures, while her stance and dress evoke the bronze sculpture of Napirasu. Indeed, the Joubji figurine may be a conscious reference to Napirasu or her religious function, as the great bronze, which had been moved from Choga Zanbil to Susa in antiquity, may have still been visible (Bridey 2018, 558–559).

The same skirt with its tiers of rounded fringe, or rather a tiny sliver of it, appears on a well-known if poorly understood bituminous relief from Susa (Aruz *et al.* 2014, 81, no. 23; Harper *et al.* 1992, 200–201, no. 141) (Fig. 10.10). The relief even shows the strongly marked horizontal band at the upper edge of the hem fringe. Thus the scene could be reconstructed as showing a standing female figure perhaps with clasped hands to the right of the table with its prominently displayed fish – another watery reference.

The images of women wearing heavily fringed skirts suggest a continuing religious or spiritual role for specific elite females in the first half of the 1st millennium BCE. This function, which first appeared in the later 2nd millennium BCE, is closely linked to water, and it is tempting to see the long, undulating fringe of the skirts as a signifier of this position or function.

No reference to this role (or roles) has yet appeared in written Elamite documents, but our interpretation of this garb may be informed by contemporaneous Assyrian beliefs and practices. Assyrian royal women were thought of as embodying both purity and fertility, that by their physical existence and religious activities they supported



Fig. 10.10 Susa, so-called *Spinner relief*. Musée du Louvre, acc no. Sb 2834 (photo © RMN-Grand Palais/ Art Resource, NY).

and enhanced the king (Gansell 2013, 392–396, 411; Svärd 2015, 80). Elam was in continual contact, both peaceful and antagonistic, with Assyria. Elamite rulers were deeply involved with power plays between the Babylonians and the Assyrians, and some Elamite nobles took refuge with the Assyrians during times of dynastic conflict at home (Dubrovsky 2018, 328–330, 337–338; Gorris and Wicks 2018, 251–254). It is not difficult to envision some commonalities of belief or religious practice between the two peoples. Indeed, the ringed and long-handled pans from Joubji have parallels from Assyrian funerary installations (Wicks forthcoming, figs 11–13). On the other hand, the heavily fringed Elamite women have a prominence in the visual arts that has no counterpart in Assyrian culture with its paucity of images of royal women (Svärd 2015, 74–80; Mofidi-Nasrabaddi 2018a, 245). This difference points to a pronounced divergence between the two cultures.

A role reversal or transference?

Two reliefs from the end of the Elamite era, the late 7th and early 5th centuries BCE, show male figures wearing long skirts covered with rounded fringe, dress that previously had been worn only by elite females. The best-preserved image is found in the Izeh valley, on a rock relief at Kul-e Farah, a box canyon with a seasonal stream and a dramatic view toward Shikaf-e Salman. The main subject of Panel I and its accompanying inscriptions is the local ruler Hanni (c. 625–585 BCE) who is shown performing or presiding over a complex ceremony involving other standing figures as well as musicians.⁵ The largest secondary figure is Hanni's vizier (*nissikkir*, literally cup-bearer) Shutruru (Fig. 10.11), whose long skirt features three tiers of rounded fringe or lappets like that worn by the seated fish-ladies of Joubji and the fragmentary

figure on the Susa relief. Shutruru is clearly male from his identifying inscription, and the remnants of his long, square-cut beard can still be seen. None of the other male figures in the relief from Hanni himself to the musicians who accompany the ritual wear the same type of garb. One wonders if this anomalous dress reflects the use of a particular type of garment to transfer (or reinforce) religious (and political?) legitimacy.

A fragmentary relief from Susa provides a second example of a male figure wearing a skirt with fringe at the waist (Fig. 10.12). In this case, the figure is Atta-hamiti-inshushinak, a little-known “king of Anshan and Susa”, who reigned in the late 7th or early 6th century BCE (Harper *et al.* 1992, 198–199; Gorris and Wicks 2018, 255–256). Are Shutruru and Atta-hamiti-inshushinak trying to reinforce their authority by usurping religious dress previously worn by elite women? Clearly we do not have enough information to answer this question, as no parallels from other periods of Elamite history are known. It is tempting to see this conspicuous shifting of clothing conventions as reflecting the unsettled state of Elam, both politically and culturally in the early 6th century BCE.

Conclusion

Early Elamite rulers and their associates wore fringed garments just as their counterparts in Mesopotamia did. But in the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE distinctly Elamite garments are identifiable. By the middle of the 2nd millennium certain elite Elamite women were depicted wearing long skirts covered with tiers of undulating fringe or lappets, garments that do not appear

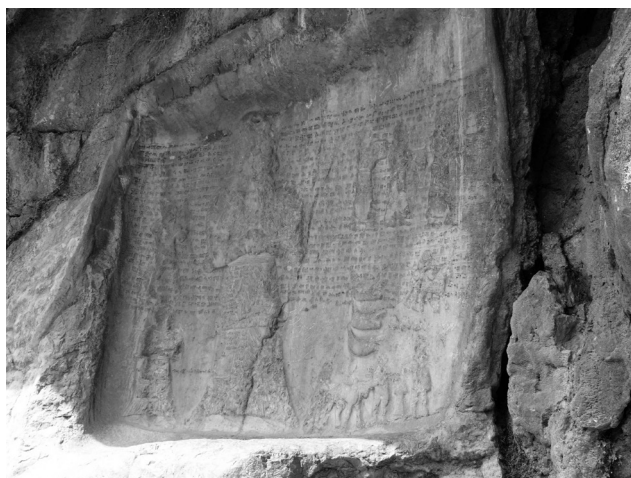


Fig. 10.11 Izeh valley, Kul-e Farah, relief panel I of Hanni (c. 625–585 BCE). Detail showing the tiered fringe on the garment of the vizier Shutruru (photos courtesy of Wikimedia Commons).





Fig. 10.12. Susa. Fragmentary stele of Attahamiti-inshushinak, approx. early 6th century BCE. Musée du Louvre acc. no. Sb 16. (Drawing by Javier Álvarez-Mon).

in contemporary Mesopotamian art. The Elamite representations are associated with the motifs of flowing vases and streams of water, while the rock reliefs face a seasonal waterfall. The association of these garments with water continued in the 1st millennium BCE with fish being an additional motif at Joubji and at Susa. In the early 6th century BCE, changes in the gender of those wearing skirts with multiple layers of fringe seem to suggest the appropriation of religiously charged female garb by male elites, perhaps an indication of deep shifts in cultural authority in that period. Although the use of the Elamite language and the veneration of Elamite deities is well-documented in the following Achaemenid period, late 6th–4th centuries BCE (Henkelman 2018), no representations of garments with heavily fringed skirts are known from this period. If the elite women continued in their religious roles, their status or function was not indicated by their clothing.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Javier Álvarez-Mon who first suggested I look at Elamite dress, and to Megan Cifarelli who organized the ASOR session in 2017 at which an earlier version of this article was presented. Yasmina Wicks and her generosity in sharing information and images of the Joubji finds was essential to my work, as was Melissa Eppihimer whose observations on fringe were very helpful. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Dan Potts whose insightful questions sharpened my thoughts, the help of Alireza Khounani in transcribing Iranian place names, Yousef Hassanzadeh, Research Center, National Museum of Iran, and the anonymous reviewer who encouraged me to go further. Barbara Carlson, Godard Space Flight Center, NASA, solved my map-making woes. The errors, both of omission and commission, are, alas, my own.
- 2 Dated stylistically to the Protoliterate/Jemdet Nasr Period, the posture and dress of this figure echo seal impressions and a few small stone figures of humans from Susa (Harper 1992, 59, 62, 75–56, nos. 25, 31 and 47). Alas, there are no parallels for the stripes, the fringe, and the tassel for the next several hundred years.
- 3 For details of the sculpture's production see Bridey 2018, 558–559.
- 4 This is not the place to discuss the exercise of power, but a consideration of heterarchical, rather than hierarchical, models of power might be productive in understanding the women who wore these garments. See Svärd 2015, 148–159, 172–174. For the possible significance of female Elamite royal ancestry see Potts 2016, 153–154; Potts 2018.
- 5 For the acoustic properties of this location see Lawergren 2018, 792–794.

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Chapter 11

The impenetrable body: armour and the male nude in Greek art

Marina Haworth

Abstract

This paper examines the polyvalent meanings of the male nude in ancient Greek art, focusing on anatomical armour and representations of nude warriors in art. Bronze armour (the cuirass, helmet, and greaves) is normally left out of the discussion of Greek nudity, although the armour's design is intricately linked to the concept of the male body, taking the form of a second, immortal skin for the wearer. This examination will show that the male nude was understood as embodying various contradictions: vulnerability, the desire for impermeability, and the erotization of the "beautiful death". These ideas are reified in the anatomical sculpted armour of the historical Greek panoply, which in turn sheds light on the ideology behind the male nude in Greek art.¹

The male nude in ancient Greek art and culture has been long understood as a marker of Hellenic identity. The nude's various uses in art have been explained as "heroic", "agonal", "athletic", "ideal", and among many other classifications, a "costume". Scholars of the last century have disagreed as to whether the Greeks themselves understood the male nude in heroic terms, or more generally as demonstrating youth, beauty, and strength. One important evidence group has been conspicuously absent from this discussion: Greek anatomical armour. Greek depictions of warriors are curiously inconsistent, showing fully armed soldiers, completely nude warriors, and a mix of nudity and weapons, often in the same composition. The elision between armour and nakedness can be quite erotically represented, especially in painted pottery. The painstaking distinctions between types of nudity in Greek art fail to sustain themselves or hold up as satisfactory explanations.

This paper will demonstrate that the ancient Greeks did indeed have some very specific notions about their use of male nudity in art, which by the late 6th century BCE became inextricably linked to their bronze anatomical armour and its conception as a second, impenetrable skin. Encased in such armour, the warrior is wearing the costume of a naked man, and becoming himself a living statue, as if embodying the god-like hollow-cast nude bronzes seen in agoras and sanctuaries across the Hellenic world. This is certainly a heroic vision of nudity, but a paradoxical frisson exists in the realization that the desire for impermeable skin is an impossible one. This armour is worn in separate pieces: cuirass, helmet, and greaves. The parts do not add up to a whole; the gaps highlight the vulnerability of the warrior to death. This idea of a second skin which is heroic, yet vulnerable; erotic, yet ultimately fatal, is employed extremely self-consciously in visual art and texts alike. Greek male nudity therefore refers not only to a vision of masculine identity as expressed in their particularly Hellenic ideal of athletics, but is also understood as a reflection of their own mortality and their relationship to the gods.

The idea of armour as a second skin has been noted (*e.g.* Hurwit 2007, 47; Ebbinghaus 2014, 154; Lissarrague 2018, 131), and the panoply as a double of the body has been presented multiple times in the scholarship (*e.g.* Knauer 1993, 238; Lissarrague 2008, 25–26). And yet, the intensely intimate connections made about bronze-as-a-skin in the ideology of Greek myth and thought have been overlooked in discussions of Greek male nudity. Although nudity has been discussed eloquently by art historians as a costume (Bonfante 1989, 544–545), the study of armour until recently has focused on archaeological artefacts, rather than integrating it into art historical discussions. A notable exception is John Fawcett Kenfield's 1973 study which demonstrated that the development of anatomical armour ran in tandem with the changes in style of Greek sculpture. Despite this understanding, exploration of the extraordinary practice of a warrior attiring himself to fight on the battlefield in the costume of a naked man has been neglected (Fig. 11.1). The related idea that armed soldiers, dressed in anatomical armour (Fig. 11.2) are physically embodying bronze statues has been noted only briefly (Flory 1994, 333; Turner 2009, 135).

It is important to note that the anatomical cuirass is not the only available option for body armour. Another type, often depicted on Greek pottery, is the linothorax – made of layers of glued linen or possibly a heavy leather cuirass. These have actually been shown to be more effective than bronze armour of comparable weight. Hans Van Wees notes that “bronze becomes harder to penetrate than leather only at thicknesses of over one millimetre, and that archaic bronze cuirasses...generally have a thickness of one mill or less”. One must therefore ask why a soldier would choose such inferior protection (Van Wees 1997, 155; Lee 2015, 206). Bronze is functional as a defence, but given its expense, the rationale for its use and prominence must be questioned if it is even slightly less effective than other possibilities. It is thought that those who wore the bronze muscle cuirass were exhibiting social status (Snodgrass 1967, 58–59; Jarva 1995, 15; Ebbinghaus 2014, 155–156; Young 2017, 99–100), but depictions



Fig. 11.1 Bronze helmet and greaves, c. 520–480 BCE, 1856,1226.710, bequeathed by Sir William Temple (© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved).



Fig. 11.2 Bronze cuirass, 4th century BCE, 1992.180.3, gift of Estée Lauder Inc., 1992 (© Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain (OA) CC0 license).

show the most celebrated personas such as Achilles, Hektor, and even Alexander the Great wearing linen or leather corselets. These corselets, too, have also been described as a “second skin” (Lissarrague 2018, 131), and as part of the panoply, indeed have that function. If bronze armour is less efficacious, the choice to use it emphasizes the significance of the material’s ability to appear as a muscular “immortal skin”.

The idea of bronze as skin becomes more explicit when we are confronted with the polychromy of these statues (Fig. 11.3), which carries an immediacy and eroticism their relatively monochrome ruined state does not. The two Riace warriors, for example, had bronze for their skin, red copper for their lips and nipples, and bright polished silver for their teeth. Their hair, including their pubic hair, was textured and unpolished, and would show as a darker brown in contrast to their gleaming, buffed skin. Susanne Ebbinghaus notes that armour gives the appearance of an “impeccable and muscular physique”, and that the skin tone is “similar to the warrior’s own, but more golden, gleaming, seemingly invulnerable” (2014, 154). The puzzle of why warriors would be depicted entirely unclothed in artworks such as the Riace warriors may partly be answered by remembering Greek bronze anatomical armour. Indeed, the addition of armour onto statues like these is redundant. Their skin itself is their armour.

This function of anatomical armour as costume of naked skin

must therefore be incorporated into discussions of the Greek male nude in art. While nudity is remarkable in ancient art outside of the Hellenic world, it is so ubiquitous in Greek art that Andrew Stewart (1997, 40) has called it the “default setting” of male representation in Greek sculpture. Attempts at single explanations for the preponderance of male nudity in Greek art have been challenged. It is now recognized that nudity has multiple uses in Greek art, although the distinctions between “heroic”, “vulnerable”, and “erotic” are still maintained. The question of why nudity in Greek imagery is so pervasive, rather than how is nudity used, has been less satisfactorily answered. One major understanding is that male nudity was connected to Greek identity, as a marker of Hellenism. The connection of nudity to Greek athletics is central to this, but otherwise the reasoning for its importance in art remains elusive. It may be instructive, then, to connect the Greek male nude to their ideology of skin as a marker of wholeness and identity (Osborne 2011, 108–117; Von Staden 1992, 228–230).

I suggest that the unattainable desire for immortal, impermeable skin resulted in different possibilities of representing the nude in Greek art. In many depictions, the



Fig. 11.3 Riace Warrior A, Bronze, c. 460–450 BCE, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Reggio Calabria, Italy (© Scala/Art Resource, NY).

distinction between the vulnerable flesh and the impenetrable bronze of armour is elided in multiple ways, sometimes explicitly highlighting the tragic impossibility of the invulnerable body, while at the same time, eroticising the paradox of the concept. There is, I think, a psychological agony in play in these artistic representations, as well as in the anatomical panoply itself, for this desire for invulnerability, reified by the armour, cannot but be intertwined with the fear of mortality, because of the incompleteness of its protection. Therefore, the distinctions drawn between “Heroic Nudity” and the nudity of a defeated, vulnerable body are unnecessary. These “nudities”, in the depiction of mortals, are one and the same. The very crux of the nude’s importance is the tragedy of the mortality of the body. These tragic contradictions are also employed in mythology, embodied in characters such as the bronze giant Talos, among many others.

While bronzes like the Riace Warriors exemplify the concept of bronze-as-skin, the complementary phenomenon, in which the naked body is considered to be like a bronze statue, is also evidenced (Osborne, 2011, 35). Plato describes an erotically charged scene in a gymnasium, in which Socrates encounters the youthful Charmides for the first time (*Charmides* 153a–155b). When Charmides enters the gymnasium, everyone, even the smallest boys, were transfixed, and “gazed at him as if he were a statue” (*agalma*). Andrew Stewart (1990, 39) explains that athletic victor statues were normally made of bronze by the end of the 6th century onwards, for “the oiled gleam of an athlete’s body, dark tanned in the sun, was well served by the tense reflectivity of burnished bronze”. It is quite probable that Plato is referring specifically to these bronze, polished athletic victor statues. Furthermore, the suggestion that if Charmides were to disrobe, his impressiveness would intensify suggests that the erotic thoughts of the perfection of his naked form (τὸ εἶδος πάγκαλός, 154d) continues the theme of his being an “*agalma*”, a “statue” or “delight”.

Xenophon, writing about Agesilaus of Sparta, connects the tan, bronzed skin of the naked athlete to that of the warrior: “believing that contempt for the enemy would kindle the fighting spirit, he gave instructions to his heralds that the barbarians captured in the raids should be exposed for sale naked. So when his soldiers saw them white because they never stripped, and fat and lazy through constant riding in carriages, they believed that the war would be exactly like fighting with women.” (*Agesilaus* 1.28, trans. Marchant and Bowersock 1925, 73; See also Bonfante 1989, 555). The idea that nudity is a hallmark of Panhellenic identity, a connection maintained through athletic festivals (in which contestants competed nude), is noted here to be a consistent visual signifier of Greekness, even outside the gymnasium (e.g. Hurwit 2007, 46; Turner 2009, 133). The Hellene’s ideal of bronzed skin and athletically trained physiques marked them as separate and distinct from non-Greeks, here assumed to be pale and untrained: Greek nudity is a form of dress signifying their identity. It is interesting that Xenophon refers here to Greek soldiers as perforce embodying their conception of the model warrior in contrast to the Persians: the Greeks are imagined as bronze and muscular, like their anatomical armour. Herodotos, rather than speaking of the warriors’ own bodies, describes the effect their godlike armour-skin had on foreign enemies: when Ionian and Carian mercenaries disembarked in Egypt “they came ashore all clad in bronze armour. Now one of the Egyptians who had never before seen men armed in bronze came to the marshes to Psammetichus and told him that bronze men were come from the sea” (*Histories* 2.152, trans. Grene 1987, 199; See also Ebbinghaus 2014, 149–151). The bronze armour was understood to be their skin. They were “χαλκίους οἱ ἄνδρας”, “men of bronze” (2.152.4).

The desire for invulnerable skin is also attested in Greek mythology: in Herakles’ first labour he defeats the Nemean Lion, whose hide was impervious to weapons.

See the neck-breaking hand that Perseus’ descendant [Herakles] lays with all manner of skill on the flesh-eating lion [the Nemean Lion]; for the gleaming man-

mastering bronze refuses to pierce its unapproachable body: his sword was bent back (Bacchylides, Ode 13, trans. Campbell 1992, 189).

Theocritus, writing a couple of centuries later (*Idylls* 25, 132–280), tells us that Herakles used the lion's own claws to skin it. Herakles then uses this skin, which no weapon could penetrate, as his own armour. There is a totemistic quality to Herakles' inhabiting the skin of the lion: Derek Collins, in *Immortal Armor*, speaks of the wearing of another's armour as a kind of *enthousiasmos* (1998, 33–34). Furthermore, he brings out the notion of the warrior as a lion, which Patroklos is compared to in *Iliad* 16.752–753. In the case of Herakles, the wearing of the skin is both the protective second skin of armour, but also imbues him with the fierce fighting qualities of the lion (Bremmer 1993, 235).

Interestingly, Herakles is unique among the heroes in his eventual apotheosis and demi-god status (Shapiro 1983, 9), and the process by which this is achieved involves the shedding of his own mortal, vulnerable skin. Sophocles tells of Herakles' death by a poisoned garment given to him by Deianeira: the cloak fused to his body, and when he ripped it off in agony, it tore off his skin. Utterly defenceless, Herakles was finished. Herakles then constructed a pyre and threw himself upon it, self-immolating, leaving nothing behind. At that point, his apotheosis was complete, and he took his home among the gods on Olympus.

The story, as depicted on pottery, highlights the importance of skin, both vulnerable and invulnerable, as something you wear. On an Attic pelike in London (Fig. 11.4), we see a naked Herakles trading his impenetrable lionskin armour for the garment which will, immediately upon wearing, tear off his own flesh. Heinrich Von Staden tells us that in ancient Greece, “to be without skin entails not only being without power but without identity” (1992, 229; See also Stager 2016, 108–109). Herakles' nudity here, painfully understood through the dramatic irony of the scene, suggests his imminent susceptibility to injury by his new clothes. Not only does the garment not clothe him, it destroys his most intimate covering: his own skin. Following Von Staden, one may suggest that Herakles is giving up his identity (his lionskin, his most recognizable attribute in art) for a garment that will also take his mortality.

Another Attic pelike, in Munich this time (Fig. 11.5), depicts Herakles' apotheosis from the pyre. Herakles, nude and triumphant in his now immortal skin, is being flown to Olympus, taken by Athena in her chariot. Below, we see the remnants of the pyre, upon which only an anatomical cuirass remains. François Lissarrague has insightfully analyzed the cuirass on the pyre as representing the body/skin Herakles leaves behind (Lissarrague 2008, 26; 2010, 200). The resemblance of Herakles' death to a sacrifice has been noted (Shapiro 1983, 16), and Von Staden, in describing sacrificial practices, explains that: “after sacrifice, the skin remains behind, on display in a temple or other public space, or in the hands of the priest, and it symbolically represents the soundness, integrity, and completion of the sacrificial purification” (1992, 228). The armour, left behind, refers to Herakles' mortal body, like the skin that is preserved as in a ritual sacrifice.

This story, suggesting immortality of the skin through fire, may also reflect a connection to bronze-working itself. Shapiro reminds us, in the context of Herakles' death, that Demeter put the baby Demophoön in a fire in order to make him immortal (Shapiro 1983, 16; *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 235–267). Her habitual roasting seemed to be working; the hymn describes the child growing strong and godlike. But apparently it was a technique with multiple stages, for the process was left unfinished when she was interrupted. The lost-wax method of bronze casting also involved several steps taken over multiple days (Mattusch 1975, 310). Demeter's actions are highly suggestive of metalworking, and bring to mind the extreme heat necessary to melt and cast bronze (1400 degrees C/2552 degrees F). Fire destroys flesh in a pyre (Squire 2018, 522), but fire is also necessary for melting the bronze cast into armour, the warrior's second, impenetrable skin. Carol Mattusch's (1975) essay on the word *κάναβος* and its use in relation to both the human body and bronze casting is illuminating here. Mattusch successfully shows that *κάναβος* can be used to describe the armature used for a sculpture in the lost-wax technique, but also reveals that the Greeks used the same language for the blood vessels and skeleton of the body as the interior supports and frames of a statue. Therefore, the bronze exterior of statuary corresponds to the skin and flesh of the human body.

Interestingly, Demeter pronounces that Demophoön will no longer be able to escape death after her procedure was interrupted, suggesting he will probably die in his prime in battle (lines 265–267). The imagery in the hymn implies that we are to imagine Demeter was fashioning Demophoön into bronze, but was tragically prevented from completing his transformation from vulnerable flesh to impenetrable bronze. Similarly, the process of bronze casting is dangerous to the original model: “only one casting can be made from a model; if the casting fails, the model must be formed again” (Mattusch 1975, 310). In the Munich pelike, the connection between

bronze casting in fiery heat, immortality, and armour is more direct, for the newly immortal Herakles has left on the pyre a representation of a mortal's failure at immortality: the bronze skin, the anatomical cuirass.

Other myths also demonstrate the anxiety regarding embodying mortal, vulnerable flesh, and the longing for invincibility. In the Hellenistic period, we find two different traditions of Thetis attempting to immortalize her son Achilles' flesh during his infancy. Apollonios (recalling the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*), tells us that she would put the baby Achilles into the fire, in order to make him immortal (Apollonios Rhodios,

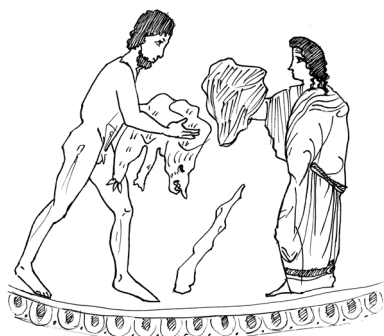


Fig. 11.4 Herakles and Deianeira, red-figure Attic pelike, c. 440–430 BCE, Beazley Archive 215017, E 370, British Museum, London (drawing by Michelle Ranta, 2018).



Fig. 11.5 Apotheosis of Herakles, Kadmos Painter, red-figure Attic pelike, c. 410 BCE, Beazley Archive 215719, J384, *Antikensammlungen*, München (drawing by Michelle Ranta, 2018).

Argonautica 4. 866–879). The connection between the skin of Achilles and bronze is implicit, as is the continued failure of bronze casting to provide invulnerability to mortals. Statius gives us the version best known today, in which Thetis plunges the child into the liminal river Styx to render his flesh immortal.

Whom else did a Nereid take through Styx' river in secret and block his fair limbs against steel? (Statius, *Achilleid* 1. 477–481, trans. Shackleton Bailey, 2004, 349)

Ebbinghaus explains that iron can be made harder than bronze by rapidly cooling a hot iron object into water in a process known as “quenching” (Ebbinghaus 2014, 147). This imagery of plunging the boy into the river in Thetis' efforts to immortalize the body of Achilles also evokes metal working processes.

The tragedy of all these motherly efforts, however, is that they are failures. As a consequence, Thetis must resort to acquiring for Achilles a second, quasi-immortal skin, commissioning the bronze-caster of the gods, Hephaistos. This visit is depicted on the important name vase by the Foundry Painter (Fig. 11.6). In the interior tondo we see a seated Hephaistos handing Achilles' newly fashioned helmet to Thetis, who is already in possession of his shield. Hanging in between them, foreshadowing Achilles' fate, are his anatomical greaves, skin-like but empty. Regardless of which version of the myth one adheres to, the greaves must refer to the weakness of the flesh that the shinguards do not cover. Unable to make his whole skin impenetrable, Thetis must make use of the piecemeal options left to her. The armoured parts leave the whole penetrable in the gaps, and the greaves foreshadow Achilles' death by this

very weakness. Jennifer Stager (2016, 117–118) has explained that the verb *kosmein* can mean “adorn, equip, or dress”, but also to order, frame a system, or make a world. When putting on armour, the warrior is equipping himself for battle, but also dressing in a new skin, one that he hopes will make or keep him whole, despite the irony of its fragmentary nature. Poignantly, the exterior of the Foundry Painter cup shows a bronze foundry (Fig. 11.7), in which artisans are creating a colossal figure of a lunging warrior, holding a shield and spear, entirely nude in what Hallett refers to as the “heroic costume” (Hallett 2005, 14). The perfect wholeness of his bronze skin is referred to by a reference to the gymnasium: in Greek pottery, the setting of the gym is created by simple markers such as the oil jar (*aryballos*), sponge, and strigil hanging in the background. These are the tools which the athlete uses to scrape and wash his bronzed skin after exercise. In this image, those tools are present to the left of the bronze workers scraping down the statue of the warrior, in preparation for final polishing (Mattusch 1980, 440). One of the craftsmen uses a strigil rasp, playing with the equation of bronze to human skin, the otherwise meaningless *aryballos* bringing to mind an athlete strigiling down his own skin. This crafting of a statue reflects the unfulfillable desire of the Achilles tragedy: the warrior statue, entirely bronze, has no need of fragmentary pieces of armour. He is already whole, skin impenetrable, a *kosmos* unto himself.

The elision of bronze body armour and the flesh of the wearer can be seen on the “cuirass torso” from the Acropolis (Plate 11.2). It is clear the artist has suggested that there is little distinction between the armour and the flesh. The armour is shown quite deliberately as a second skin: the fine edge that defines the bottom of the cuirass is barely delineated, and the cuirass is very tightly fitted to the torso. One may recall the scene from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, in which Socrates visits an armourer. There he interrogates the idea that the armour must be of the correct proportions to the wearer, discussing how the armour must move with the warrior, not as an encumbrance, but as “something extra”, an “appendage” (πρόσθημα) (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.10.9–15; See also Neer 2010, 156). Πρόσθημα has been translated as “an accessory”, but our understanding of that term in English may belie how close the meaning may be to “additional/extra skin”. Vincenz Brinkmann, in describing how the armour looks as if it is the torso’s bare skin, notices that “beauty and vulnerability are fixed components of the Greek warrior image” (2007, 101), noting that artists like to “reveal the genitals by raising skirt-pleats in that area” under the bottom edge of the body armour (Brinkmann 2007, 102). It is an artistically significant decision to stress the vulnerability of the genitals of a warrior.

The erotic aspects of the male nude are intrinsic to its power, and the combination of the intense vulnerability of the genitals, unprotected by armour, and the desire for whole, impermeable skin lends itself to some playfully ironic representations in art (Fig. 11.8). On a cup by Onesimos in Boston, we see a highly sexualised battle scene in which the young warriors are depicted nude, except for helmets and greaves. The greaves are only delineated by a simple line at the kneecap and ankle on some of the



Fig. 11.6 Hephaistos and Thetis, Foundry Painter, red-figure Attic kylix, c. 490–480 BCE, Beazley Archive 204340, F 2294, bpk Bildagentur, Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany (photo: Johannes Laurentius, © Art Resource, NY).



Fig. 11.7 Foundry workers, Foundry Painter, red-figure Attic kylix, c. 490–480 BCE, Beazley Archive 204340, F 2294, bpk Bildagentur, Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany (photo: Johannes Laurentius, © Art Resource, NY).

figures. On other figures, Onesimos has omitted the line at the ankle, deliberately blurring the boundaries between skin and armour. The exterior shows a fallen warrior speared directly in the genitals, from which blood flows. Here the artist acknowledges and calls into question the frisson between armour as an impenetrable second skin, and one's actual, vulnerable, and immanently erotic skin. The victorious warrior holds his spear directly at the level of his own genitals, rendering it into a phallic symbol, and the moment of attack reads as a sexual act. The humour of this scene works on multiple levels: the understanding of the function of nudity and armour, the cultural associations of sexuality as homoerotic, and also a metaphor for defeat on the battlefield. Ogden has shown that the Greeks "often conceptualised military defeat in particular in terms of being buggered" (Ogden 1996, 132).

This fear of vulnerability, both the piercing of one's physical skin as well as sexual penetration, is explicit in the myth of Kaineus. This young woman, after having been raped by Poseidon, was granted her wish for impenetrability: she was turned into a man, with impermeable skin (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XII). The Boston cup makes explicit the homoerotic association between sexual penetration and penetration by weapons. The poet Tyrtaios famously celebrated the eroticism of a beautiful young man dying, (e.g. Vernant 1991, 65), when describing the ugly death of an old man in battle, with bleeding genitals, in contrast to the death of a young warrior, who is desired by all. The cup negotiates the depiction of the *kalos thanatos*, the "beautiful death" of the young man with some irony. The warrior's skin is shown with the articulated muscles of a bronze cuirass, even as his vulnerability is shown by his wounds gushing blood; his nakedness is eroticized. The intersection of eroticism, death, and heroism are linked together in the image of the nude warrior.

This understanding also helps illuminate the issue of male nudes on funerary markers across the Hellenic world, seen in vases, statues, and stelae (Plate 11.1). This Apulian funerary vase features a formulaic image: a marble tomb featuring a statue within a naiskos (or small temple), accompanied by armour depicted with added yellow to indicate bronze, in contrast to the added white of the figure, suggesting marble as his vulnerable flesh. The warrior, now deceased, appears to be contemplating his mortality and the irony of his failed attire of "immortal" skin. Unlike the only hero to achieve his place among the gods, Herakles, immortal skin is an impossible dream for even the warrior with the most *kalos thanatos*. Armour, therefore, is common in the funerary repertoire because it is a stand-in for the corporeality of the deceased, while serving as a comment on the mortality of the flesh. Once the body is gone, the armour remains as its double, representative of the body's shade, its *eidolon* (Lissarrague 2008, 26; Young 2017, 107; Squire 2018, 519).

Ultimately male nudity in Greek art cannot be separated into categories such as heroic, vulnerable, or erotic. For the male nude is all of these in one, as are the desperate human warriors who aspire to embody the immortal skin of the heroes and gods (like "bronze Ares" *Iliad* 5.704), by donning bronze armour, fashioned to appear as naked, though invincible flesh. The wrenching dramatic irony of knowing



Fig. 11.8 Warriors in battle, Onesimos, red-figure Attic kylix, c. 500 BCE, Beazley Archive 203265, 01.8021, purchased by MFA from Edward Perry Warren, Henry Lillie Pierce Fund (photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

it is impossible is what makes the imagery powerful. Greek male nudity acknowledges the desire for invincibility, while highlighting the all too vulnerable and sensual skin, with the fatalistic knowledge that man is inescapably mortal.

Note

- 1 I want to thank Megan Cifarelli for kindly inviting me to contribute to this volume. This began as a paper presented during the panel *Bodies, Dress and Adornment* at the 2018 AIA annual conference, and will be developed as a larger project.

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Chapter 12

Dressed to dazzle, dressed to kill: staging Assurbanipal in the royal lion hunt reliefs from Nineveh

Omar N'Shea

Abstract

The lion hunt reliefs from the North Palace of Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) depict the encounter of the last great Neo-Assyrian king with the lion, the royal antagonist par excellence. The royal lion hunt as an encounter with the beast in the wilderness as well as in the imperial hunting park of the city of Nineveh is a scripted, choreographed, and staged event intended to foreground the figure of the sovereign. Central to the multisensorial spectacle of masculine prowess is the hunting garment of the sovereign made of rosette-patterned textile and accessorized with rosette motifs on the royal fez, the diadem, the wrist bands, and the arm bands. In addition, a stylus is wedged inside the belt that fastens the Shulgi-style skirt. Although the image appears to present two masculine identities that stand in tension with one another (the king as virile hunter and the king as scholar), an investigation of the various levels of signification of the sovereign's hunting garment reveals that it relayed messages to the audience that were at once theological and political through revivalist and innovative fashion technologies.¹

Introduction

Assurbanipal's lion hunt reliefs depicting the king's encounter with lions in a hunting park in Nineveh and in the wilderness are spectacular displays of Neo-Assyrian royal masculine prowess. The hunting of lions was, in fact, a royal prerogative already evident in a basalt relief dating to the late Uruk period c. 3300–3000 BCE (Aruz and Wallenfels 2003, 22). The orthostats lining the walls of Room C in Assurbanipal's North Palace in Nineveh suggest that the royal hunt in an enclosed imperial park was intended to provide a multisensorial recreational experience for the public (Weissert 1997, 342) as well as an occasion for the sovereign to fashion a self-image as a hegemonic male who restores order over chaos. Indeed, by the late Neo-Assyrian

period, the image of the encounter between sovereign and beast had become so fixed in the Assyrian imaginary that the state employed it on the royal seal as a metonym for kingship at least as early as the reign of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BCE) (Sachs 1953, 167–170, pl. XVIIIIf; Radner 2008, 487) (Plate 12.1). The lion hunt reliefs, executed around 645 BCE, have been subject to extensive studies on their continuous style of narrative (Watanabe 2004, 103–114), their symbolic function (Weissert 1997, 339–358), as well as their craftsmanship (Aker 2007, 229–263). But to date, little has been said about the function of the sovereign's hunting dress in the lion hunt relief cycle. This chapter focuses on the royal garment in Assurbanipal's hunting reliefs now in the British Museum, London to attempt an interpretation of some of the messages encoded in the king's hunting dress. Through the integration of dress and gender theory, I hope to show that the hunting garment carried messages that constructed a discourse which was at once theological, political, and masculine.

Context of the reliefs

Room C constitutes what has been called the “ideological centre” of Assurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh (Matthiae 1996, 201). The entire sector is made up of a series of rooms and passageways (the ascending passage R, Room A at right angles to it, the long and narrow Room C, Room E, Room S, as well as the upper story Room S¹) dedicated almost entirely to the hunting activities of the sovereign. David Kertai posits the possibility that the large number of hunting scenes shown on the reliefs in the North Palace may be an indication of the primary function of the palace itself, that is, as the royal hunting lodge (Kertai 2015, 184). Indeed, the hunting relief cycles are given more space in Assurbanipal's palace than elsewhere in Neo-Assyrian royal buildings; the only other space in a Neo-Assyrian palace devoted almost entirely to the hunting activities of the king is Sargon II's Room 7 at the Palace of Dur-Šarruken. Previously, the hunting of bulls and lions as well as the sacrificial and libation rituals following the slaying of the beasts formed part of the visual programme of the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II. These scenes, as the royal inscriptions of the ruler make clear, took part during the campaigns in the West, and were therefore intricately linked to the martial activities of kingship. Room 7 at Dur-Šarruken is dedicated to the hunting activities in the royal park, with the bottom register showing the Assyrian aristocracy hunting small game and the top register showing a scene of commensality following this recreational activity (Matthiae 1996, 196–197; Winter 2016). The topos of the hunt in Sargon's Room 7, however, can hardly be seen as a proper revival of the earlier motif since it concerns a leisurely small game hunt more akin to aristocratic recreation than a display of manly valour. In fact, it may have been Sargon II's policy of returning the nobility to the Neo-Assyrian court that promoted the homosocial hunting activity in the first place.

But Assurbanipal's North Palace hunting reliefs bring the topos to unprecedented heights and hence may be seen as a royal venture which had great implications

in the ideology of Assurbanipal. As Paolo Matthiae notes, Assurbanipal's hunting reliefs take up Sargon II's tradition; the lions are not hunted in the Syrian steppe, and they are not taken by surprise in their native habitat and therefore at the peak of their vigour. Rather, they are released in an urban arena surrounded by armed footmen carrying spears and lances and it is more of a "circus act" than a hunting battle (Matthiae 1996, 198). At Nineveh, as often happens in the art from the reign of Assurbanipal, there is a synthesis of earlier traditions and in the revival of the lion hunt we witness the re-emergence of the king as protagonist with the lion as the only true royal antagonist (Matthiae 1996, 196–198). Indeed, the hunting reliefs showcase an event that was staged by the state for the entertainment of the public as well as an occasion for the king to disseminate a political message and to promote a newly-fashioned imperial self-image.

Staging the hunt

The spectacle lies not just in the unfolding of the sequence of events, however. Equally impressive is the staging of the event itself, which seems to have been carefully scripted and choreographed in order to create a royal canned hunt for the maximum visual pleasure of the public, not only through the narrative action of the event, but also through the thematically unified design of the dress of the king and his men. Indeed, central to the construction of the image of the late Neo-Assyrian king as the most dazzling individual of the composition as well as the hegemon in a homosocial hierarchy are the garment and the accessories, including the stylus which Assurbanipal carries wedged into the belt around his waist (Seidl 2007). All these elements make up the royal sporting dress for the event. Following Joanne Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach Higgins, dress is here defined as an assemblage of body modifications (such as hair, beards, nails, and odor) and/or supplements such as garments, attachments, and hand-held items which convey messages ranging from status to gender (Eicher and Roach Higgins 1992, 15–17). The hunting scenes, in fact, show dress through body modifications such as the king's luxuriant beard, and supplements through the use of patterned and decorated garments, the conical fez and royal diadem, jewellery such as the king's armbands, wristbands, and earrings, as well as the stylus which modifies the dress of the sovereign. All these elements that in their ensemble make up Assurbanipal's sporting dress were carefully crafted to relay messages about the identity of the sovereign. The beard, possibly a part-prosthetic piece that is longer, more abundant, and more ornate than that of the other intact males in the arena, is not only a marker of mature masculinity and hypervirility over other males, but it is also a signal of intact corporality given the near-absolute reliance on eunuchs in the later Neo-Assyrian period as officials in key administrative positions (N'Shea 2016, 214–221). On the other hand, the diadem, the garment, the armbands, and the hand-guard, as well as the wristbands and his bow, are all thematically linked through the rosette and lion motifs to place Assurbanipal

at the centre of the audience's visual pleasure on this sensational occasion. Catherine Bates argues that in societies where the procurement of meat could be achieved through other means than hunting, the latter activity becomes more of a symbolic act of gleaning social prestige than an act of subsistence (Bates 2013, 8–9). As an all but “pure” signifier, the utilitarian function of hunting became wholly subsumed under the domain of the symbolic. That the killing of lions was the sole prerogative of the king underscores the symbolic function and the social prestige that was attached to the hunt. Bates also argues that by Assyrian times, rulers went to great and costly lengths to stage public royal hunts in order to choreograph the sovereign's rule over mammals, and by extension, over men, and concludes that the symbolic domain of the hunt is evidenced in its “staginess and self-conscious” theatricality (Bates 2013, 9–10).

But what message did the state artists seek to encode in these visual displays? What was the meaning of the rosette-patterned textiles in the hunting gear and on the royal fez? And what is the role of the stylus as a supplement in the dress of Assurbanipal? Royal pageantry sees the construction of a prosthetic masculinity and royal self-identity through dress in terms of body modifications and supplements. Indeed, Jack Halberstam argues that hypermasculinity is a spectacle that relies on prosthetics such as dress for its construction and illustrates this point by referring to James Bond's masculinity and its entire reliance on the prosthetic scaffolding of suits, cars, and gadgetry (Halberstam 1998, 3–5). Dress, therefore, may be seen as a form of somato-prosthesis which redefines the end-limits of the body; as argued by Lambros Malafouris, the body's relation to the material world of our historical circumstances problematizes the commonly-held boundaries between the physical and the social body (Malafouris 2008, 125). In this sense, therefore, dress as material reality opens up new possibilities for our construction of bodies, self, and self-awareness. If royal masculinity is a discursive trait that is inscribed onto the body through somato-prosthetics and enacted through display and pageantry, then the lion hunt reliefs, with their clearly scripted and choreographed performance of masculine prowess expressed through dress, likewise become the site for the redefinition of the identity of the late Neo-Assyrian sovereign and the understanding of the royal body through body modification and supplementation.

In his close combat scenes with the lion as well as on horseback (Room S), Assurbanipal wears a composite garment made up of a wrap-around skirt that is knee-length at the front and longer at the back, and a top vestment that covers his entire torso and his arms to the biceps. Natalie May has recently shown that Assurbanipal's hunting skirt is a conscious revival of the courtly style of Naram-Sin of Akkad and, to a lesser degree, to the short kilt worn by king Shulgi, the latter being the sovereign upon whom Assurbanipal seems to have modelled his self-presentation (May 2013, 204–205). The skirt is secured with a broad waistband that traditionally also held in place the hunting dagger. Here, however, we see that Assurbanipal replaced the dagger with a long and thin writing instrument called the stylus whose function was

to imprint wedges into clay for the writing of cuneiform script (Plate 12.2). For the first time in Neo-Assyrian art and dress history, the stylus becomes part of the royal garment. It may be obvious to state that the stylus has no bearing on the hunting sport of killing lions in the arena, but it seems to have been important for the construction of the king's identity even in this event. Furthermore, the top and bottom garments are decorated with patterns which seem to have had great bearing on the event. The lower garment has rosette bracteates similar to the hundreds of rosette appliques that have been excavated from Tomb II of the queens' tomb in Nimrud (Hussein 2016, 21) and to those found in a burial in the vicinity of modern Behbahan in southwestern Iran (Álvarez-Mon 2011, 207). The upper garment was an elaborate design of rosette patterns as well as a rectangular pectoral panel with a variety of motifs that revived the 9th-century court style of king Ashurnasirpal II. The royal fez and diadem worn by the king also have rosettes embroidered or sewn onto them. The wrist band too is a rosette tied with a strap. Embellished with light-reflecting bracteates and polychromatic jewellery, the king's splendour would have dazzled the audience and the adversary with *melammû* (divine radiance) and possibly equalled the glamour of a cult-statue, at least in the optics of dress (Neumann 2017, 11–12).

Thus, Assurbanipal was elaborately dressed and decorated in order to achieve the construct of prosthetic hyper-masculinity. The royal figure in these hunting cycles is also the most intricately dressed and accessorized individual of the composition, followed by the charioteers, whose dress reveals lesser complexity with their square-patterned textiles and minimal body adornments. In other visual representations of Assurbanipal, such as the famous “Banquet Scene”, the king is similarly seen dressed in elaborate materials consisting of geometric and floral motifs. Amy Gansell has argued that some elements of dress in this royal banquet point more to the construct of Assyrian identity than to gendered differences between the royal male and female (Gansell 2014, 407). More recently, Gansell has stressed that Assurbanipal and his queen Libbali-Sharrat's elaborately-patterned fabrics and headgear signal hierarchy over the other individuals in the composition (2018, 68, 89). Indeed, in the rest of the relief programme, the other persons reveal a simpler fashion than earlier Neo-Assyrian periods. Through dress, therefore, the court artists reveal the hierarchy of masculinities and femininities and thereby place the king and the queen at the apex of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity.

The rosette

Ninth-century courtly garments are known for their complex designs and elaborate patterns, evidenced clearly in Ashurnasirpal II's robe on slab 2 from room G of his palace in Nimrud (ANE 124565). Such elaborate decorations as geometric, floral, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic patterns on garments, however, are not reserved solely for the dress of the sovereign. In fact, Peter Bartl has clearly demonstrated that for the reliefs from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II, the king is not the only distinctive person who

requires to be dressed (and represented) with the most complex amalgam of patterns on the garment (Bartl 2014, 45). By the reign of Assurbanipal, however, the range of decorative patterns narrowed down, and courtly fashion had taken a minimalist turn. The hunting reliefs from the North Palace of Assurbanipal reveal a fashion concern that is revivalist of earlier styles, and innovative at the same time. Indeed, the reign of Assurbanipal is generally characterized by a synthesis of earlier styles, with the sovereign being the primary person who requires to be presented in the most elaborate manner of dress. Fashion revivalism is clearly evidenced in the rectangular pectoral panel of the sovereign's hunting garment, a clear resurfacing of the style of Ashurnasirpal II's courtly dress as seen in the decorated robe on slab 2 in Room G of his palace at Nimrud. Assurbanipal's pectoral panel is similarly bordered by bands with varying patterned designs including rosettes, lotuses, and concentric circles and encloses a mirror image of the king on either side of the sacred tree under a winged disc (Guralnick 2004, 228–229) (Plate 12.3). On the other hand, there were also clear signs of innovative fashion technologies. Courtly fashion and state artists employed the rosette in all of Assurbanipal's hunting gear, whether in the royal hunting grounds of Nineveh or out in the wilderness. It is indeed the most prolific pattern in the lion hunt cycles. Rosette-patterned textiles had a long history in Assyrian fashion technology, especially in the context of kingship. During an encounter with crown Prince Sennacherib on a relief from Dur Šarruken, Sargon II wears rosette-patterned fabric similar in style to what Assurbanipal wears in the lion hunt. But this is the first time the pattern is used so abundantly and in the context of the encounter between sovereign and beast.

Javier Álvarez-Mon notes that for 1st-millennium elite fashion, most rosettes on patterned textiles were bracteates sewn onto the garment (Álvarez Mon 2011, 207–208). As noted, rosette bracteates decorate the king's garment, as well as his conical three-tiered fez, armbands, and wristbands. The rosette (*ayyaru*) is a known symbol of the goddess Inana/Ištar in ancient Near Eastern visual culture, and epigraphic evidence of a votive inscription on tablet K 6085 commemorates the consecration of an urban hunting arena to Ištar of Nineveh (Weissert 1997, 341). In addition, Assurbanipal's hunting bow clearly belongs to Ištar as well. Hunting epigraph E: 2–3a states that “I have placed the furious bow of the Lady of Battle (*i.e.* Ištar) over the lions I have killed” (*nēšī ša addūku tilpānu ezzetu ša bēlet tāhāzi elišun azqup*). The rosette pattern on the hunting garment may have had a prophylactic function, but a close investigation into the elevation of Ištar during the reign of Assurbanipal may help us to unravel the political function of the sovereign's hunting dress.

In her recent study on the role of Ištar in the reign of Assurbanipal, C. L. Crouch (2013, esp. 132) has concluded that the sovereign elevated Ištar to the role of divine warrior-hero through literary allusions to *Enuma Elish*. The role of Marduk as divine warrior in the creation tradition had been replaced by the national god Aššur during the reign of Sennacherib, whose overwhelming problem with the governance of Babylonia triggered a revision of cosmological traditions in favour of the national god of Assyria. However, Assurbanipal's own political problems with Šamaš-šumu-ukin's rebellion in the south encouraged him to revive the cosmological tradition again,

but this time in favour of the prophetic deity Ištar. Indeed, Cylinder B and the Ištar Temple Inscription foreground allusions to *Enuma Elish* with Ištar taking the role of the triumphant warrior hero (Crouch 2013, 132–140). In this sense, therefore, this legitimization tactic elevates Ištar to justify the sovereign's martial activities symbolized by the royal hunt. The rosette bracteates on Assurbanipal's hunting dress continue to emphasize the role of the prophetic warrior goddess in his revision of the cosmological tradition. Assurbanipal's dress, therefore, is at the centre of the spectacle of staged masculinity and of martial and theological ideology.

The stylus

If Assurbanipal's hunting gear makes clear allusions to the elevation of Ištar in the theological politics of the late Neo-Assyrian empire, the stylus that the sovereign wears in his belt points to his claim to scholarly masculinity. Seemingly an index of redundancy in hunting fashion, the stylus as part of the body adornment of the ruler is, in fact, a crucial innovation in the political ecosystem of late Neo-Assyrian history. As pointed out by Frederick Fales and Giovanni Lanfranchi, in the Sargonid period the scope of the sovereign's self-image broadened to include technical expertise and overall knowledge. According to Fales and Lanfranchi (1997, 111), this redefinition of the image of kingship was due to the combined effects of internal pressures at court, the new social pressures that emerged with the shifting imperial landscape, as well as the propaganda aimed at newly annexed territories. This innovative expression of Neo-Assyrian kingship reaches its zenith in the reign of Assurbanipal, as evidenced in numerous textual occurrences such as his *Prism F* in which the sovereign lays a claim to scholarly masculinity:

Furthermore, I Assurbanipal, learned inside it [The House of Succession] the wisdom of the god Nabû, all of the scribal arts. I investigated the precepts of every type of scholar there is, learned how to shoot with a bow, ride a horse [and] chariot, [and] take hold of [their] reins. Kings among the people [and] lions among the animals could not grow powerful before my bow. I know how to wage war [and] battle; I am experienced forming a battle line [and] fighting. Heroic male, beloved of [the god] Aššur and the goddess Ištar, descendent of kingship (*Prism F. L. I 24–33*).

May has taken such proclamations as indicative of Assurbanipal's revival of Neo-Sumerian rhetorics of kingship, but this triple claim (the king is a scholar, a hunter, and a military commander-in-chief) brings together perhaps the central logic of Neo-Assyrian kingship – that is, the management and control of the Other through technical expertise, strategies of war, and ultimately the giving of death.

Conclusion

Assurbanipal's dress in the lion hunt reliefs negotiates meaning and identity on multiple levels. The elaborate decoration on the garment is at once a revival of 9th-century style from the courtly fashion of Ashurnasirpal II in its decoration,

and a return to earlier, Neo-Sumerian royal identity in matters of style. In this late Neo-Assyrian style, however, the ensemble of geometric, floral, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic patterns is reserved solely for the figure of the king, who emerges as protagonist once again in the visual syntax of the reliefs. At the same time, the king's hunting dress is a visual expression of his claims to multiple configurations of masculinities, that is, as a hunter and as a scholar. The presence of the stylus as an item of dress is unprecedented in the history of the ancient Near East, and perhaps it reflects the growing need for a redefinition of kingship in the increasingly "international" socio-cultural ecosystem of the first millennium. In addition, fabric patterns were clearly not chosen arbitrarily; indeed, the rosette-patterned fabric carried clear political and theological messages to an audience that would have been concerned with Assyria's relations to Babylonia during Assurbanipal's reign. By foregrounding Ištar in the textual, visual, and sartorial expressions of his reign, Assurbanipal was clearly making bold claims about the place of Marduk in his version of the cosmological tradition, as well as breaking away from his grandfather's choice of Aššur as the warrior hero.

So much, then, for the construction of royal identity in the lion hunt reliefs of Assurbanipal. At issue, however, remains the question of reception in Assurbanipal's attempt to portray hegemonic royal masculinity through his hunting dress. It is admittedly difficult to reconstruct this in its emic context, but at least one strand of evidence may throw light on its success or otherwise in later royal courts. Ctesias of Cnidos, a resident physician at the court of the Persian king Artaxerxes II in the 5th century BCE, collected stories that were in circulation at the Persian court about the Assyrian kings. One thread that stands out tells of a certain Sardanapallus, a later rendering of the name of Assurbanipal. In Ctesias' *Persica*, reported through Diodorus Siculus, Assurbanipal is portrayed as an effeminate bisexual who languished in his palace in women's dress, white-lead face make-up, an affected female voice, and smeared in luxurious body lotions like a courtesan (Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 133; Rollinger 2017, 576–579). In this later tradition, Sardanapallus' sartorial choices and expressions, specifically in his choice of luxurious fabrics and his personal penchant for the spindle, and for producing soft wool and purple garments, become the focus of critique of his performance of a socially acceptable configuration of masculinity. It may be that Diodorus Siculus embellished Ctesias' account, yet by the time of Ctesias, the name Sardanapallus had already been synonymous with luxurious, if effete, dressing. In fact, Hellanicus of Lesbos, the first Greek historian to deal with Assyria in the sixteen surviving fragments of his *Persica*, already mentions a Sardanapallus who is a luxury-loving effeminate (Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, 48–49). Did such pomp, theatricality, and costly masculinity ultimately undermine the reputation of Assurbanipal among his contemporaries and later court establishments? We may never know for certain the reception of Assurbanipal's construct of dress among his own contemporaries, but it certainly failed to achieve the desired outcome in later historical epochs. Rather than signalling royal

hypervirility, the sartorial splendour and love of luxurious jewellery of the last great Neo-Assyrian king became a tool of socio-political criticism levelled against Assyrian kingship in later royal courts. Finally, if, as Frahm (2014, 169) admits, the stories about Assurbanipal may have been more than just Orientalist fiction, then perhaps the dress innovations, especially in the style and ostentatious luxury introduced in the hunting dress, may have equally signalled an undoing of the traditional norms of royal masculinity for Assyrian kings.

Note

- 1 I would like to thank the editor, Megan Cifarelli, for inviting me to contribute to this volume, and for her generous suggestions during the writing of this chapter. I am also grateful to Saana Svärd for the many conversations we have had about Assurbanipal over the years, and to Sophus Helle for reading an early draft and for guidance on the multiple self-images of this last great Neo-Assyrian king. Finally, I would like to thank my friends Annabelle and Essa for sending me photographs for my study. All errors are my own.

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Chapter 13

Banqueting, dress, and the idealized Sogdian merchant

Betty Hensellek

Abstract

This essay investigates the social function of the kaftan when worn for the occasion of a formal banquet, as represented on a wall painting of life-sized banqueters from the Sogdian city of Panjikent in Tajikistan. Past scholarship has called attention to the luxuriousness of the patterned fabrics worn by the banqueters and convincingly suggested that the painted personalities belong to the elite mercantile class of Sogdian society. Building on this, I address the potential social significance of the subtle dress distinctions between banqueters. I argue that fine details of these representations, including the turning out of the kaftan lapels, participate in a sartorial system. I propose that the careful placement in gathering rooms of images of banqueters displaying subtle dress distinctions in fact articulated a dynamic spectrum of decorum that dictated proper behaviour and appearance for the participants of actual banquets held in the room. I suggest that the wall painting of banqueters was not merely an imitation of a noble practice for social mobility, but a potent image of conviviality and behaviour intended for emulation by members of the elite Sogdian mercantile class.¹

Introduction

A row of men settle into the evening's festivities with elegance and poise (Plate 13.1; Fig. 13.1). Engaged in conversation, each attendee sits upright and cross-legged atop a plush cushion. Most of the men masterfully balance a shallow drinking bowl with two fingers, while one holds a sturdy tankard; one attendee raises his bowl for a toast. Some of the men also hold bejewelled flywhisks to keep themselves comfortable during the evening's festivities. To the left of the attendees, a servant turns to offer additional refreshments and, further on, a smaller figure in white rests upon a cane, apparently overseeing the festivity. Most striking is the attendees' vivid dress. Each

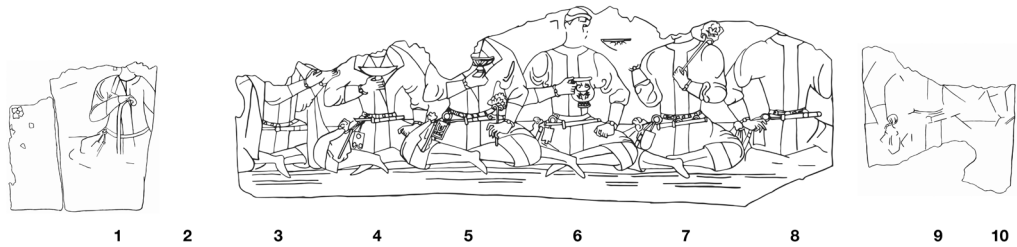


Fig. 13.1 Surviving painted figures from the southeast corner of XVI:10 Panjikent; personage numbers are designated for reference in the essay and also for their placement along the wall in Fig. 13.5 (drawing by author; vector graphic conversion by Constantina Dendramis).

wears a kaftan, a garment composed of four defining features: long sleeves, a fitted bodice, an attached skirting, and most essentially, rectangular-shaped front panels that close one over the other, and which have the ability to turn out and form triangular-shaped lapels (Fig. 13.2).

These banqueters (life-size at about 95 cm high seated) were part of a larger composition that adorned the walls of a house excavated in the Sogdian city of Panjikent (Pendzhikent), in what today is Tajikistan (Fig. 13.3). This room (number 10 in sector XVI; hereafter XVI:10) belonged to a large residence that its excavators dated to the first half of the 8th century CE (Raspopova 1990, 20, 24–25; Kulakova 2014, 183) (Fig. 13.4). The surviving painted scene comes from the southeast corner of the room (Fig. 13.5). The largest and best-preserved three-piece section of the painting (c. 3.5 m long) includes five banqueters and one servant (Plate 13.1).² Two smaller preserved

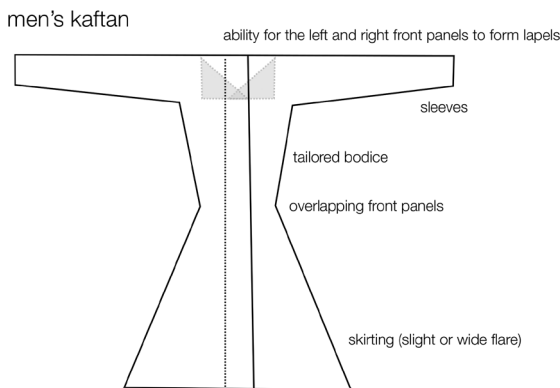


Fig. 13.2 Men's basic kaftan pattern (drawing by author).

sections each contains a single figure: the lower torso and arms of a sixth life-sized banqueter (Fig. 13.1, personage 9),³ and the torso of the figure with a cane already mentioned (Fig. 13.1, personage 1).⁴ Aleksandr M. Belenitskii, the Russian historian of Sogdian art and director of the Panjikent archaeological expedition from 1954 to 1977, noted that at the time of the room's excavation in 1961 paint traces indicated that banqueters once adorned all four walls of the room (Belenitskii 1973, 29).



Fig. 13.3 Location of Panjikent, Tajikistan (2018 Google Earth; markings added by author).

Belenitskii and Boris I. Marshak have highlighted the luxuriously patterned textiles that the banqueters wear and have put forth the convincing conclusion that the painted personalities belong to the elite mercantile class of Sogdian society, based on the black wallets that hang from the banqueters' belts rather than long swords (Belenitskii and Marshak 1971, 18). Studies specifically exploring Sogdian dress and textiles have included the banqueters in chronological categorizations of textile patterns (Raspopova 2006, 67–73) and drawn ethnographic parallels to 20th-century Central Asian costumes (Lobachëva 1979, 20–21); however, these previous studies have not discussed the wall painting with banqueters in relation to the architectural space in which the paintings were found, nor in relation to banqueting practices. Hints about the significance of banqueting within Sogdian culture can be gleaned from diverse sources. Alongside several banquet paintings adorning homes,⁵ Sogdian documents were uncovered at Mt Mugh about foodstuff deliveries, including wine delivered for an evening banquet (Bogoliubov and Smirnova 1963, 29–30). A rich array of drinking and serving vessels of precious metals, typically of gilded silver, such as those seen in this and in other Sogdian paintings, have been discovered in hoards across Eurasia (Marshak 1986).

This essay investigates the role of the particular garment – the kaftan – in images of participants in a formal banquet in a banqueting space in Sogdiana.⁶ I hope to demonstrate that the banquet imagery adorning the walls of gathering rooms was not merely a playful decorative backdrop but articulated a dynamic spectrum of decorum dictating the diners' behaviour and appearance for the actual banquets held in the room. I will first introduce gathering rooms within the private houses of Panjikent's residential area, and how several architectural features can help to make



Fig. 13.4 Large home in sector XVI Panjikent including room XVI:10 (drawing by author).

sense of Sogdian banqueting practices. I will then analyze the representation of the banqueters from XVI:10, in order to reconstruct the dress code and etiquette that would have been recognized by individuals encountering these images at a formal banquet. Lastly, I will reconsider the previous assumption that the wall paintings of Panjikent were simply imitations of a noble lifestyle, which residents projected for the purpose of upward social mobility (Raspopova 1990, 182–189; Marshak with Livshits 2002, 5). On the contrary I will argue that the painted banquet was a potent image of conviviality and behaviour intended for emulation by members of the Sogdian elite mercantile class.

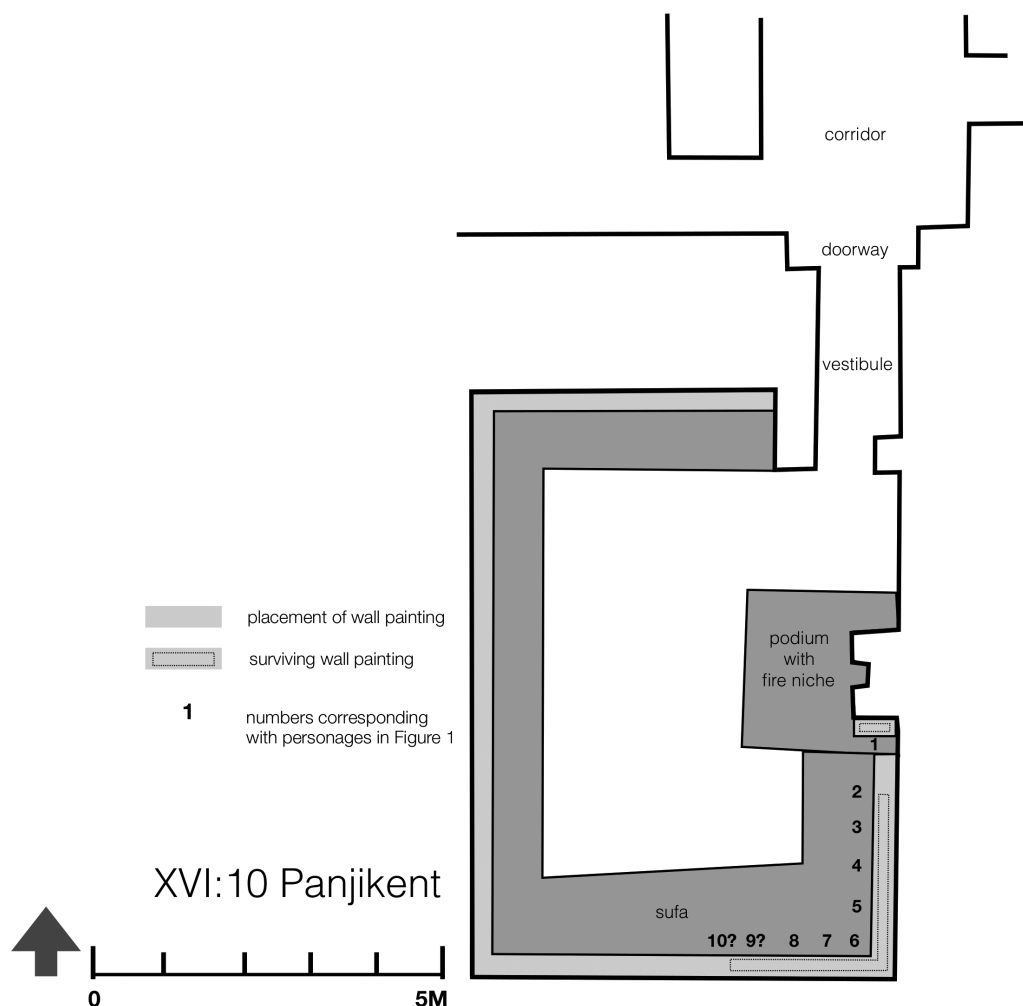


Fig. 13.5 Floor plan of XVI:10 with surviving painting placement indicated (drawing by author).

Spaces for gathering

The chief architectural component demarcating rooms for gathering people at Panjikent and in greater Sogdiana was the *sufa*. This built-in bench of clay, usually about 40 cm high and a metre deep, followed the perimeter of a quadrilateral room with its interruption at the doorway. The most common type of room for gatherings is termed by Russian archaeologists a reception hall (Russian *paradnii zal*). It is characterized by a square plan, sometimes with wooden columns at the corners that support a wooden raftered ceiling; high walls, which accommodated multiple registers of wall paintings; and, opposite the doorway, a cult wall with a podium-like protrusion in the *sufa* (Kulakova 2014, 90). Room XVI:10, from which the banqueters come, is typologized by Russian archaeologists as a less-common type of room for gatherings,

a “chapel” or a “home sanctuary” (Russian *kapella* or *domashnee sviatilishche*). Though the two room types share features of a built-in bench and an open central floor plan, the “chapel” has some unique features that include an entrance through a vestibule, a lower ceiling, a rectangular plan, and a niche on a podium in place of a divine image (Lur’e 2014, 89).

With the exception of courts and colonnaded halls, such bench-lined gathering rooms were the largest enclosed spaces in residential houses, most measuring between 30 m² and 70 m² (Raspopova 1990, 50–68); room XVI:10, from which the banquet painting comes, is relatively large at 47 m². Whether a “reception hall” with its painted deity or a “chapel” with its niche, in designating the seating arrangement, it is likely that one did not sit on the podium in front of the deity, or the niche; this left at least three long benches available for seating in both room types. Estimating that each individual requires approximately 75 cm of personal space (based on an average height between 165 cm and 180 cm), the average seating occupancy for most gathering rooms ranges from 10 to 30 guests; XVI:10, therefore, could accommodate around 20 guests.

Smaller houses had only a single room for gatherings on the ground floor, but many houses had two, and some still more, like that to which XVI:10 belongs (Raspopova 1990, 28–49). This particular house was one of the largest 8th-century homes in Panjikent (Fig. 13.4). In addition, a mega *sufa*-lined colonnaded hall, along with four rooms for gathering, was located on the ground floor: two reception halls, a large “chapel”, and a second smaller “chapel”. Standard for architectural planning in Sogdiana, each room for gathering was positioned on the ground floor directly off a main corridor that was connected to the building’s entry. This allowed guests to enter from the street and reach a gathering room without passing through more private familial spaces, many of which were located on the second floor (Raspopova 1990, 143). In addition to interior spaces, this home has several rooms between 5 m² and 10 m² lining the western wall which Marshak and Valentina I. Raspopova have interpreted as shops and workshops belonging to the owner of this large home (Raspopova 1990, 162; Marshak with Livshits 2002, 14).

Differences in the composition and content of wall paintings suggest that gathering rooms may have accommodated a range of activities for specific kinds of guests. In some reception halls, the multi-register wall paintings begin with the lowest and only half-metre high register of small panels, depicting fables and tales, placed directly under one or more larger painted registers (see *e.g.* Marshak with Livshits 2002, figs 12, 31–51). Set directly above the *sufa*, this narrow register would be difficult for the adult guests to see as their seated bodies would cover the scenes. This low placement and the approximately one-metre length of these scenes is ideally legible for children, for whom the subject matter is likewise well-suited. Complementarily, the painted registers above – typically narratives or epics – wrap around the room at eye level and higher, and so are visually accessible to both adults and children. This combination of short fables placed at a low height with longer epics above may indicate that such rooms were designed for use by people of all ages.

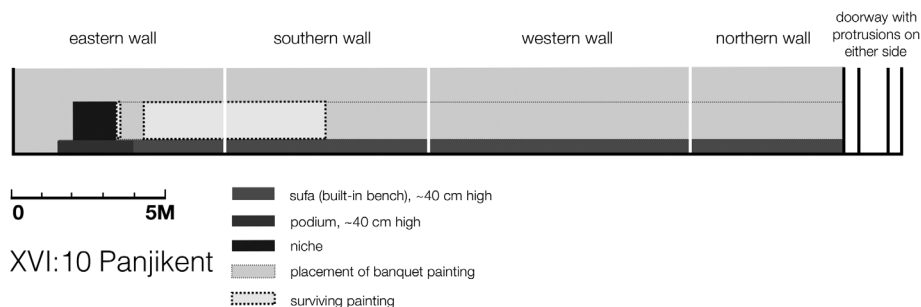


Fig. 13.6 Reconstructed elevation plan of walls in XVI:10 with surviving painting placement indicated (drawing by author).

In contrast, rooms with painted banqueters – reception halls, “chapels”, as well as small temple halls – do not have these small didactic fable registers. Instead, the figures of banqueters – many life-sized – were painted directly above a narrow geometric or vegetal frieze; thus these banqueting figures were positioned directly behind the actual guests who took their seats on the *sufa* (Fig. 13.6). In some rooms the paintings of banqueters were paired with scenes of celebration or narration in above registers or with images of deities on the wall opposite the doorway (e.g. Marshak and Raspopova 1990), while in others, such as XVI:10, they were not.

These two distinct wall painting compositions, with their specific subject matter on the base register – fables and banqueters, suggest two distinct audiences and thus two distinct methods of interaction between the viewer and the wall paintings. Gathering rooms with a low didactic base register seem to be spaces that welcomed family and friends, *i.e.* men, women, and children. The paintings – whether a concise fable on the lowest register or a prolonged epic spreading across multiple walls on the upper registers – are narrative in nature, and invite a diverse audience to stimulating conversation and general entertainment. In contrast rooms with banqueters were more suitable for another audience: adult men of an elevated social position. The known Sogdian painting corpus confirms only men’s attendance at such banquets, suggesting that rooms adorned with male banqueters were an exclusively male space.⁷ The paintings’ placement, size, and subject encourage the actual diners to find themselves among the idealized banqueters pictured on the walls of the room.

The idealized banqueters

The formal banquet appears to be a conventional image type – each man appears with standard seated posture, physique, and dress. Each sits cross-legged and upright; each displays broad shoulders and a wasp-thin waist, the cut of his kaftan accentuating these proportions; the early 8th-century fashion of a gathered upper sleeve and wide skirting further exaggerates each man’s hourglass silhouette.

The banqueters are of a generally uniform size, in contrast to servants (Fig. 13.1, personage 3) and the figure with a cane (Fig. 13.1, personage 1), who are comparatively

diminutive. The attendees sit in an evenly spaced row, their bodies entirely frontal. Each banqueter is paired with his immediate neighbour as if in conversation, indicated by the direction of his hands and inclination of a surviving head and another's chin. The servant, about 10 cm shorter than the banqueters, also sits cross-legged, but his torso is turned to the right, his outstretched arms offering refreshments from a dish that rests on a roundel-patterned serviette. The figure with a cane on the niche wall is likewise shorter, but also stockier, a contrast to the idealized hourglass silhouette of the banqueters.

Some kind of formal decorum appears to dictate behaviour and appearance at this banquet. Proper behaviour seems to prescribe that guests at this formal banquet sit upright and cross-legged atop individual cushions, drink from a gilded vessel, and speak with their neighbour. The standard attire is a two-toned kaftan – one fabric selected for the body and another for a contrasting trim. The *au courant* kaftan had long sleeves with excess fabric gathered on the upper arm. The front right panel overlaps the left by about 10 cm to 15 cm; a wide A-line skirting falls below the knees covering the top of high-shaft soft leather boots. A belt includes a suspended dagger, a cloth pouch, a leather wallet, and another small tool case, perhaps a small knife. Headwear and hairstyle may have been significant, but it is difficult to draw conclusions with only one banqueter's head preserved.⁸ A hand-held accessory such as a flywhisk or fan would have provided comfort and perhaps some element of style or status. Form and size of the drinking vessels varied, their shapes likely dependent on the type of beverage rather than the status of the drinker.

Amidst this uniformity, only the variety in kaftan colour and textile pattern is initially striking – each attendee's is unique. Most fabrics are decorated with monochromatic large vegetal roundels – red-on-maroon, mustard-on-gold, light blue-on-white, black-on-olive; an exception is one banqueter's boldly contrasting dark blue-on-white fabric. These fabrics are paired with more colourful or tightly patterned trim textiles: polychrome pearl roundels, interlocking squares, and small crosses. The servant wears a plain yellow kaftan, although the edges are still embellished with a geometric-patterned fabric, and his serviette with pearl roundels. The figure with the cane wears a light blue-on-white kaftan with a pearl roundel trim.

Further distinctions in dress are subtler. Two of the men have loosened the top frogging of their kaftan to create opened lapels (Fig. 13.1, personages 4 and 5), while the others keep their front panels closed neatly around their necks. Is it coincidental that these two banqueters also wear belts that are more densely covered in gold plaques than the others, whose belts have fewer, more widely interspersed plaques? Furthermore, looped from their belts these two banqueters wear leather wallets with gold ornamentation while the others' wallets are plain. What do these subtle distinctions mean?

While the individual distinctions in dress and posture amongst these figures are subtle, when considered as a whole they appear to point to important, and potentially replicable status distinctions. There are finely tuned differences in the amount of

metallic ornamentation, specifically on the belts and wallets. Those individuals who sport the most gold-encrusted accessories (Fig. 13.1, personages 4 and 5) wear a red and a dark blue kaftan, respectively, and for the banqueter in dark blue, strands of stitched pearls along the belt add to the lavishness of his dress. This additional embellishment of the banqueters in red and dark blue kaftans correlates with the unbuttoning of the kaftan, in which the front panels fold outward to form triangular lapels to reveal a contrasting inner lining of colour and a respectively blue and red collared under-tunic that complements the red and dark blue kaftan. This colour pairing also extends to a matching blue and red dagger and tool case. Looking closely at posture, the banqueter in dark blue sits prestigiously in front of the other attendees as indicated by his knees overlapping a knee of the adjacent red- and white-clad banqueters.⁹

The shorter and stockier man with a cane is curiously disconnected from the idealized banqueters (Fig. 13.1, personage 1; Fig. 13.5). Located on the protruding half-metre of the wall that composes the fire niche along the eastern wall, a real guest could not sit in front of the figure and thus mirror his position. Furthermore, this figure would have been visible only to those seated in the southeast corner, likely remaining unobserved to the majority of guests in the room. Scholars have previously suggested a priestly occupation for this figure based on his seemingly older age and position in the room (*e.g.* Belenitskii and Marshak 1971, 18); however, despite his unique placement and contrasting physique, it is important to point out that he does share with the younger banqueters the adherence to the dress code of the polychrome kaftan. Perhaps his lack of belt accoutrements suggests his removal from the concerns of daily life, and thus he can be understood as an elder or ancestor partaking in or overseeing the festivities.

A Sogdian sartorial system

The banqueters of Panjikent XVI:10 appear to express a range of subtle social distinctions. No participant is overtly distinguished by unique dress or accoutrements, and each one shares more sartorial elements with his fellow banqueters than those that would set him apart. Dress and accoutrements appear not to have been based on fixed rules, but on broadly defined parameters within which negotiations based on social status were permitted. I would like to propose that the subtle distinctions in clothing adornment and modes of wearing the kaftan depicted in the painting of Panjikent constitute a type of sartorial system.

To characterize this system, it may help to juxtapose formal sartorial regulations with informal ones. The contrasting sartorial models of the Roman *toga virilis* and the modern men's business suit provide examples of each.¹⁰ To wear the *toga virilis* was not a personal choice, but a privilege and necessity for Roman citizen boys coming to maturity. A precise hierarchical order signified by additions to and modifications of the toga with respect to colour, decoration, and drape was highly regulated and strictly enforced (Goette 1990, 2–10). In contrast, the men's business suit of today's

corporate culture is worn within a set of increasingly pliable, but unspoken rules. The suit does not require a background check for purchase, nor does it come with an instruction booklet. A firm might note in the paperwork of newly hired employees the necessity of wearing “business attire”, but rarely would fabrics, cuts, colours, or designs be prescribed for a position. Still, there are unspoken rules that one must navigate; a fashion *faux pas* might occur by wearing the wrong colour in the wrong season, or more egregiously were one to over- or underdress.

Self-presentation in the social realm, like 1st-century Rome or 21st-century New York City, was likewise integral for social and economic success in 8th-century Panjikent. Dress was unquestionably encoded yet appears to have been more fluid, and closer to the model of the business suit. This type of sartorial system appears to allow for individual tastes, such as fabric pairing, but also incorporates fine hierarchical details such as a greater number of gilded accoutrements, matching accessories, being allowed to unbutton the neck of the kaftan, and possibly the wearing of certain colours, such as red and dark blue. Thus, the kaftan seems to have been the basic unit of the sartorial system for merchants in Sogdiana, and I suspect that this garment gained widespread cross-cultural use because of its exceptional versatility. The kaftan not only has design variations selected at the time of production of the garment, for example, trim and body fabric pairing, or the fashionable gathering in the upper sleeves; but more importantly the lapels could be styled and re-styled effortlessly and instantaneously transforming an individual for a desired role. Depending on the situation, a person could enact a transformation by quickly re-styling his kaftan, as, for example, when stepping from a meeting to a celebration. Such mutability could also be crucial when approaching someone of more senior rank, for whom closing the lapel could be understood as a sign of respect.

The painting of banquet attendees from XVI:10 demonstrates that the kaftan played a significant role in social interaction, in this case, at a banquet, but also as I suggest elsewhere for other social occasions.¹¹ Thus, the kaftan became a familiar medium through which social roles and ranks were experienced, projected, and perceived.

Attending a banquet

When attending a banquet in XVI:10, guests would first enter the house through a large courtyard (XVI:75) (Fig. 13.4). To show them their host’s affluence, they would have been led through a decorated entry into an enormous colonnaded hall covered with wall paintings (Raspopova 1990, 57). Reaching the doorway into the main corridor, they would have caught a glimpse of the interior of a large four-column reception hall (see XVI:32a). The position of the doorway would not have required them to turn their heads to peer intrusively into the room, but instead, they would have a direct view of the hall’s eastern wall on which the host’s family

patron deity was painted. Turning down the main corridor, these guests continued directly into XVI:10.

Crimson-washed walls would have dramatized this transition from the 3 m wide corridor into a 1 m wide vestibule. Stepping out of the vestibule, the guests would have first caught sight of a fire on a podium just 1.5 m before the doorway. At this same moment, guests would have glimpsed the painted figures along the southeast corner. Because the protruding podium did not allow the guests to walk directly into the room, they had to turn right and then left. In doing so, they came face-to-face with the life-sized banqueters adorning the full perimeter of the room.

Textual sources from Sogdiana's neighbouring cultures, Sasanian Iran and China, indicate that one's seating placement at the banquet was prescribed (e.g. Daryaee 2009, 115; Skaff 2012, 152–155). Though no Sogdian sources survive to explicate this, the architectural features of the room and the paintings make clear that a formulated seating arrangement existed. The seats along the *sufa* provided various degrees of seeing and being seen. The vantage point from the southeast corner had a clear view of the door, allowing for supervision of who entered and exited the room. Moving along the western wall towards the northern wall, the ability to see the doorway lessened. Those guests seated in the southeast corner were not only honoured by their proximity to the niche, they had an unobstructed view of the festivities. Based on the painting fragments found in this southeast corner, it was not coincidental that these seats were for guests who signalled their status by unbuttoning both lapels of their kaftans.

The narrow width of the vestibule allowed only one guest to enter at a time, thereby making one's entrance into the banquet appear somewhat ceremonial. Taking a seat along the furthest southern wall – and especially the southeast corner around the podium – would have made a bold impression on the other guests. Those seated in the corner would have paraded across the room, thus presenting both front and back views of their garments for all those seated on the western and northern wall. Upon taking a seat the details of their dress may have corresponded with those of the seated figures painted behind them. A scan of the room's sartorial assemblages, real and painted, would have reinforced one's own position as well as giving hints about fellow attendees' social station.

The idealized Sogdian merchant

Having observed these sartorial distinctions and their alignment with posture and placement in the room, we turn to the question of how guests banqueting in the room might have made sense of the painting's details. Were the sartorial distinctions among the painted figures associated with wealth, seniority, titles, or accomplishments? I suggest that these hierarchical variations were built on business success, a significant social distinction in Sogdian culture. The mercantile class within Sogdian society was unique among neighbouring cultures. Unlike Iran, where

merchants were grouped with artisans in the fourth and lowest class (Daryae 2009, 47–49), the mercantile class in Sogdiana was elite. An 8th-century Sogdian letter (A-9) from Mt Mugh lists the mercantile class directly below the uppermost class of the nobility (Belenitskii and Marshak 1981, 20; de la Vaissière 2005, 161–162; Livshits 2015, 76–77).¹² Sogdian historian Étienne de la Vaissière has compiled contemporary sources in multiple languages – Chinese, Armenian, and Arabic – that document the hard-working mentality and respected position of Sogdian merchants (de la Vaissière 2005, 160–161).

Gathering for conversation, eating, and drinking was certainly an event for multiple levels of society. For the merchant class, however, the banquet as well as *images* of the banquet would have been particularly meaningful, not merely as a pleasurable pastime, but an occasion critical for advancing one's career.¹³ Whether travelling long-distances or managing production and distribution at home, the banquet provided a setting for building and maintaining relationships with clients as well as fellow merchants, while images of the banquet provided a visual manual for them. Based on the visual analysis of room XVI:10 with its painting of banqueters, we noted only subtle distinctions among these men's dress and posture. This permits us to posit two simultaneous impressions that visitors, upon entering the room, might have experienced. The first is of an assembly in a convivial and communal space – an impression reinforced by the close seating arrangement, the participants' sartorial similarities, and their sharing of drinks and conversation. The second, communicated through minute details of fabric colour, the decoration of accessories, and, most important, the styling of an individual's kaftan, is of a social and economic hierarchy being actively negotiated through an individual's dress.

For these Sogdian merchants, showing off the gains of diligent work would certainly have been an appropriate reason for commissioning such wall paintings, especially in rooms that were intended for entertainment. Naturally, those merchants who reached lofty positions in their careers would want to boast of their success both in personal sartorial self-presentation as well as in the communal spaces they offered to their clients and to fellow merchants. This "showing-off" would not only have presented a credible and trustworthy image needed for business transactions, but also encouraged and validated the styling of one's kaftan within a broader sartorial system. By participating in the system, a merchant could effortlessly transform himself for various roles: at one moment he might maintain empathy with his lapels closed and in another assert dominance with both lapels turned open. Thus, these images of banqueting within the residential areas of Panjikent should not be read merely as attempts to imitate the uppermost noble class (Raspopova 1990, 182–189; Marshak with Livshits 2002, 5), but as constructing the unique identity of the mercantile class. The rows of painted banqueters, who lined the *sufa* drinking, conversing, and making merry showcased the dynamic and flexible sartorial system, in which the Sogdian mercantile class engaged and emulated.

Notes

- 1 Thank you to Megan Cifarelli for the invitation to be a part of this volume on fashion in the ancient world, and for her suggestions that greatly improved this paper. Thank you to Judith Lerner for the detailed feedback on a draft of this manuscript, and thank you to Benjamin Anderson for the stimulating discussions, and the support for this project since its inception as a conference paper delivered in Panjikent, Tajikistan in the summer of 2016. Thank you to my colleagues in Saint Petersburg, Russia, Larisa Kulakova, Pavel Lurje, and Valerii Nikonorov, for facilitating my research and offering astute feedback on a presentation of this paper at the State Hermitage Museum. All Russian is transliterated according to the American Library Association and Library of Congress, but without the diacritical circumflex over ts for ц, iu for ю, and ia for я; the breve ĭ for й; and the dotted é for э; author's names originating in the Cyrillic script are given according to this system with any variation by publication given in parentheses in the bibliography.
- 2 One servant is complete, while a knee and hanging pearl roundel-patterned serviette appear to belong to a second servant (Fig. 13.1, personage 2).
- 3 This fragment does include the arm cuff of a seventh preserved banqueter (Fig. 13.1, personages 9 and 10).
- 4 Thank you to Larisa Kulakova at the State Hermitage Museum who first directed me to the figures depicted in these two sections, and who also kindly gave me the opportunity to study them in person at the State Hermitage's Staraia Derevnia Restoration and Storage Facilities.
- 5 Further banqueting scenes come from XXIV:1, XXV:12, and XXV:28 Panjikent, all of which are residences. However, these three banqueting scenes, which I interpret as drinking parties, vary from the formal banquet discussed in this paper. The most distinctive feature of a drinking party is the sharing of a rhyton among all attendees, while at the formal banquet each attendee holds his own vessel. Further differences correlate with posture and how the kaftan is styled (Hensellek forthcoming). In addition to idealized representations, the banquet also appears within narratives, for example in VI:1 Panjikent. In this painting, among climatic moments of battle, is a gripping scene of a young warrior delivering news to a king, which causes him to spill the contents of his drinking bowl at a banquet (see Marshak with Livshits 2002, 147, figs 97–98).
- 6 This study is part of a larger project investigating different types of banquets, their corresponding dress and etiquette, and the subsequent social significance in Sogdiana and greater Central Eurasia.
- 7 Though the known Sogdian painting corpus confirms only men's attendance at either the formal banquet or drinking party, in southern Uzbekistan (neighboring Tokharistan) wall paintings of a formal banquet show that women – and indeed women of an elevated status – were actively engaged in this activity alongside men. I am investigating the formal banquet in Tokharistan according to the wall paintings from Balalyk Tepe in a future publication with the German Archaeological Institute.
- 8 In early descriptions of the paintings, the banqueters are said to have had small cartouches placed near their heads, but none survive (Belenitskii and Marshak 1971, 18).
- 9 Some scholars have associated the colour blue with kingship in Central Asia, especially among Turkic groups, with whom the Sogdians were in close contact (*e.g.* see Golden 2006, 142). A study of painting pigments by Aleksandr Kosolapov with Boris Marshak identifies lazurite-pigmented ultramarine as the most expensive non-local pigment in Sogdian painting (Kosolapov and Marshak 1999, 53, 78). In theory it is possible to compare paint pigment values with fabric dye value based on the accessibility of the materials needed for the fabric's dye bath as well as the labour involved in the preparation; however, with regards to the colour blue, current technology cannot differentiate between plant species producing the most common blue colouring matter, indigotin (Hofenk de Graaff 2004, 53, 257).

- 10 Thank you to Benjamin Anderson for suggesting these models during an early discussion on this project.
- 11 This sartorial system revolving around the polychrome kaftan is the subject of my doctoral dissertation at Cornell University. My project investigates the social function of the kaftan when worn at four distinct occasions: the banquet, the hunt, veneration, and burial, across Central Eurasia from the 5th through the 10th centuries CE.
- 12 Thank you to Pavel Lurje for first directing me to this document after a conference presentation of this paper in Saint Petersburg fall 2016.
- 13 To date archaeologists have not excavated any wall paintings with a banquet scene from a palatial site in Sogdiana; however, this is not to say that banqueting imagery in such a context may not have existed. It is also worth mentioning that even outside of Sogdiana, banqueting imagery prevails among the Sogdians associated with the mercantile class living abroad. All the stone funerary beds and sarcophagi from the tombs of Sogdians and Sogdian descendants discovered in present-day China are decorated with at least one banquet scene. The surviving epitaphs in several of these tombs state that the interred was a *sabao* (薩保), a community leadership position, which, according to several Chinese sources, was (at least originally) related to trade (de la Vaissière 2005, 149–150).

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Part Four

Beyond identity

Chapter 14

A sense of stone and clay: the inter-corporeal disposition of Minoan glyptic

Emily S. K. Anderson

Abstract

Seals have a powerful and peculiar connection with people. That they serve as signifiers of social identity, symbols of status and power, has been well established and extensively discussed. The association of the seal and the human body has also been investigated, but there are dimensions of this corporeal relationship that demand further consideration and problematization. My aim is to interrogate the unique dynamism of glyptic objects, both seals and seal impressions, as they participate in social actions with and without humans. The dynamism of these material things – their distinctive juxtapositions and movements, potentials for physical engagement and separation, their interactive surfaces, the intimacy of their involvement with human flesh, and their decisive abandonments of it – gives rise to truly vibrant material engagements with persons. These ideas and their implications are examined through the corpus of Bronze Age Cretan glyptic and ultimately, my discussion closes with a case study drawn from this field, specifically concerning seals and seal impressions representing lions. Working through this lens offers contextualized insight into the prismatic ways that seals and seal impressions contribute to sociocultural experience – practically, poetically, presently, and absently.¹

Introduction

Seals were crucial, multivalent objects in the sociocultural life of Bronze Age Crete, as in many other social spaces throughout the eastern Mediterranean. They were at the same time an innovative means of extended social interaction (within and between communities) and objects intimately entangled with personal identity. This relationship was at times visible, but more basically and necessarily it was physical. Throughout the Bronze Age Aegean seals were typically pierced to be worn on a person's body, a corporeal location confirmed by both mortuary evidence and visual

culture depicting people wearing seals (Plate 14.1). Bodily interactions between people and glyptic objects were fundamental to the mechanics of sphragistic seal use, charged with deliberate movements and motivations through which nonhuman things were embodied with social will and efficacy. Interrogating the inevitably somatic nature of these actions is vital to making the social processes of seal use “real” and hence to better appreciating the lived dynamics of a technology that was in many ways – both subtle and dramatic – profoundly involved in aspects of fluid sociocultural change experienced in social spaces throughout the region. At the same time, to recognize the prismatic ways in which these things contributed to people’s experience of their world, we need to focus new attention on aspects of the corporeal relations of persons with seals and impressions that were active beyond just those moments when a “transaction” was underway. Here we can problematize the fact that seals, as worn objects manifesting identity and identification, held a highly privileged position against human skin, directly juxtaposed to a person’s ongoing movements and undertakings. At the same time, the clay impression poignantly countered this bodily intimacy with the person, being born of it, always referring to it, but necessarily breaking free of that human’s orbit to be an independent locus of interactions – to be felt, pondered, sorted, and smashed in other moments and potentially other places. Hence while it is typically the visual aspects of glyptic that receive the most attention in scholarship, touch and bodily association were the lifeblood of the relations and dealings of these objects, running through and characterizing all of their interactions, including those beyond the sphragistic spotlight. There are many facets of such bodily engagements and disengagements with glyptic objects to consider. In the following pages I begin to explore a number of these, while focusing on the somatic intimacy of seals with their human possessors and its contribution to the socially powerful dynamism born of the *three*-bodied relationship of the seal, person, and stamped impression.

Seals’ complex inter-corporeality

During the Early Bronze Age on Crete, seals were often weighty objects, sizable chunks of stone, bone, or ivory apparently worn on strings hung around the person’s neck. In the Middle and Late Bronze Ages Cretan seals generally became smaller, and surviving evidence indicates they were typically strapped against the skin at the wrist (see Fig. 14.1). In these positions the seal not only was readily available for use, it was, more fundamentally, a physical presence embedded in the frequent actions of a person’s hands, arms, and entire physical being as she carried out the multifold tasks in which people’s bodies engage.² Here the seal was potentially experienced in many ways, from many perspectives. It would have been visible to people with whom the seal wearer interacted, as well as to others who may not have been especially close to that person but could still appreciate that a seal was being worn – a known object type occupying a recognized position. No doubt being in possession of a seal,

being able to connect a seal with one's body, was an established indication of status in a community, a powerful human-object link that was looked for by others and felt directly by the person in question.³

Some people would have had further contact with the seal worn on another person's body. Those who directly dealt with the seal wearer likely were close enough to appreciate the object's colour, refraction of light, shape, possibly its texture, and other fine features of the material, such as veining or inclusions – indeed such details are sometimes represented in Cretan imagery of people who are wearing seals (see Fig. 14.1). Appreciating such dimensions of a seal, and their dynamic interplay with their surroundings, was likely more significant than the modern glyptic scholar immediately presumes, impacting not only the valuation of the seal but perhaps also its perceived social and bodily efficacy.⁴ Some people (beyond the wearer) would have directly felt the physical form of the seal with their own bodies. We can imagine that people working in close quarters or involved in tasks that necessitated physical interaction may have touched the seal. But so, too, would those who had other reasons to be close to the seal owner and her body, such as a friend, lover or child, who may have played with the seal while being held (I can still recall the finest details of a ring I used to explore on my grandmother's hand, its slightly uneven curvature, the exact contours of the inclusions in the moss agate it held). Moreover, the object may have elicited other, specific forms of bodily contact. Think, for example, of the touch of lips that the signet ring worn on an authority figure's finger has traditionally received in western religious and royal culture as a demonstration of respect, most notably the

kisses still given to the Pope's Piscatory Ring in Roman Catholic culture (Fig. 14.1). Such bodily interactions with seals may not have been directly involved in the sphragistic practices that we tend to isolate in our consideration of ancient glyptic, but they nevertheless would have constituted equally impressive dimensions of people's experiences with the objects, through which their sense of them took real material, social, and emotional form.

The seal's most fundamental relationship was with its human possessor. Conceptually, the seal and this person held a commanding connection, one that permitted the seal and, through it, stamped impressions, to be empowered with remarkable sociocultural efficacy that paralleled that of the person. This conceptual paralleling, however, was at the same time a physical, bodily paralleling, with powerful haptic dimensions. Touch is

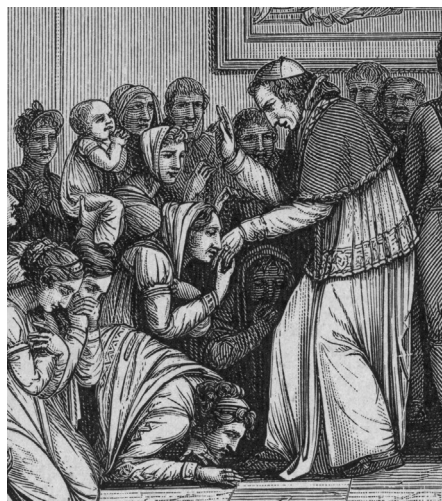


Fig. 14.1 Pope Pius VII blesses those that kiss the ring on his finger, while pilgrims kneel in adoration (© Mary Evans Picture Library/age fotostock).

arguably the foundational sense, the basis for all others (see Montagu 1971). It has the potential to be deeply emotional. Touch manifests the immediacy of a connection, the closure of distance when felt and rupture when it is lost; it is the experience of certain closeness. We might more readily recognize the significance of touch when it is interpersonal, but the intimate relations of people and things deeply impact the contours of our social, cultural, political, and emotional existences (on things in human experience see *e.g.* Ingold 2002; Gosden 2005; Bennett 2010; Knappett 2005; Knappett and Malafouris 2008; Malafouris 2013a). The touch shared with a thing is at times conscious, vividly active; at times passive, quiet. It can be singular and idiosyncratic, or deeply habitual and repeated, even without reflection, such as one's familiarity with a pair of glasses worn each waking hour. It may be acute and marked – the jarring sting of a misguided hammer on one's thumb – or soft, even lulling – the gentle stroke of linen against the neck. Such interactions characterize human presence in the world, alongside and as part of other cognitive/bodily processes.

Let us consider the seal perched against a person's wrist or chest in this light. While the visible presence of the worn seal could be socially beneficial and hence desired, at times seal wearers would have had ample cause to position the objects directly against their skin, perhaps even beneath their garments. For seals worn at the neck, this would keep the significant object-body protected as the person moved, and would generally help secure and control it. Moreover, aspects of the perceived efficacy of the seal may have derived from and been conditioned by its contact with human skin. The materials used for seals ranged considerably. They possessed a plethora of colours, from imported semiprecious stones such as amethyst, carnelian, and lapis lazuli, to steatite and bone that could be found on Crete. These varied in hue from violets and blues, to reds, oranges, and greens, to what we would identify as black and whites (see discussion and brilliant colour plates in Krzyszkowska 2005). Light would have passed through or been absorbed by the seals with great variability, depending on environmental conditions, the type of material and its idiosyncratic properties (*e.g.* fractures, inclusions), as well as its position against the skin, thickness, and cut, possible further processing and potentially its setting in another material (*e.g.* in gold). A material's relative hardness, density, and thermal conductivity would alter its feel against flesh, impacting, for example, how warm or cool a worn seal would seem.

These materials could, in turn, be carved into a variety of forms, ranging from the delicate circular planes of lentoids, to boxy multi-sided prisms, from zoomorphs and peculiar shapes such as the plunger-like Protopalatial *Petschafte*, to the lithe slender bodies of amygdaloids (Fig. 14.2). The texture of the material and the edges or roundedness of its particular shape would be complicated by the crucial rises and falls of the engraving made on the seal's intaglio face(s) (Fig. 14.3). The engraving itself, its look and feel, depended on a number of interrelated factors. The tools and techniques used in cutting the seal would interact with the particular properties of the material, resulting in distinct breaks in its surface. Some softer materials, such as bone and steatite, could be incised with simple burins and blades. The development



Fig. 14.2 Cretan Bronze Age seals of various shapes. CW from top left: CMS VS1A.304, lion head, Monistiraki, Prepalatial; CMS VI.459, lentoid, “Knossos”, Neopalatial; CMS VI.106, prism, “Archanes”, Protopalatial-Neopalatial; CMS III.2, seated monkey/ape, “Messara”, Prepalatial; CMS IS.75, amygdaloid, “Crete”, Neopalatial; CMS VI.129, Petschaft, “East Crete”, Protopalatial (images reproduced courtesy of the Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Institut für Klassische Archäologie, Universität Heidelberg).



Fig. 14.3 Cretan Bronze Age seal with deep engraving. CMS II.1.196. Lebena, Prepalatial (image reproduced courtesy of the Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel, Institute for Classical Archaeology, Universität Heidelberg).

of the fast drill in the Middle Bronze Age meant that harder stones could newly be worked and opened the door to a new repertoire of technical possibilities (Krzyszkowska 2005; Younger 1993).⁵ Beyond the question of technique and materials alone, stylistic matters thus become relevant. Different styles – each individual manifestation of which was an interplay of embedded choice, practice, aesthetics, learning, material, and access – felt different when met on the surfaces of seals: think of the distinct tactilities of a surface packed with light engraving versus one punctuated by only a single cluster of deeply cut gouges that form an isolated motif. If the engraved seal face was turned against the skin, the peaks and valleys of such distinctive intaglio designs would impose themselves on the flesh of the person’s wrist and vice-versa, briefly leaving an inverse relief in

the skin and altering its colour as blood retreated from the capillaries. Against the skin, the press of the seal's distinctive material body would have become an aspect of a seal wearer's basic haptic experience, at times being more or less marked out through thoughtful engagement.

People come to know intimately the surfaces of objects they wear, forming mutual relationships. We press our fingertips, hands, and lips against their surfaces, sensing their weight, textures, feeling out their smooth open curves or abrupt angles. The thing's biography, like our own, is fluid, and the alterations in both bodies affect their relation – just as the formation of callouses, the swelling of joints, and sensitivity from sunburns would impact the sensorial engagements of human with seal, so, too, would the discolouration of a seal stone from sun exposure, surface changes born of accidental bangs and additive repairs, as well as gradual physical wear from repeated activities. Positioned directly on the human body, stones and organic materials such as bone and ivory invite manual manipulation. We fidget with them, twirl and rub them. An object can leave its mark on our skin, but our bodies also leave their impressions on objects like seals. The oil in our skin can alter the surface properties of a stone, affecting its refraction of light, its apparent colour, and texture. While we can consider these matters empirically, in terms of measurable effects, there potentially are emotional and cultural dimensions, as well, and agency becomes complex. Stone dealers today often assert that certain stones desire regular human contact. A jeweller specializing in jade bestows the stone with a thirsting sense of its own, writing, “Jade loves love! So love your jade! (...) The love provides the jade with the natural oils it craves and uses to maintain its beauty” and, moreover, the touch of your hands “keeps your jewelry healthy” (Mason-Kay 2017). In many ancient cultures, as well as modern ones, certain materials were thought to possess properties that were vital and animate (see *e.g.* Andrews 1994, esp. 100–106; Germond and Berger 2005, 17–25 on Egyptian amulets). To have these materials against one's body brought the person within the active purview of the material and vice-versa, offering benefits that were often specific and powerful. Amulets in Egypt dwelt on the human both when that body was alive and dead, their specific positions being significant, as was their colour, shape, and markings they might carry, including abstract and representational images and texts potentially incised into their surface (script was also engraved on some Cretan seals from the early 2nd millennium BCE).⁶ The present corporeal properties of both amulet and human were relevant, rendering their interaction an articulated dialogue. Hence not only were these objects not passive, they were *interactive* – they were invigorated with specific, dynamic character and efficacies that took form through engagements with a human body (*cf.* Knappett 2004).

Thinking about the active, physical dimensions of amulets can help us to deepen our recognition of potentially similar affordances in seals. Amulets were vibrant parts of many Bronze Age cultures in the eastern Mediterranean (see *e.g.* Van Buren 1945; Goff 1956, 1963). Moreover archaeological evidence indicates that amulets themselves were frequently long-distance travellers between far-flung places during the period,

perhaps being of special value to those persons making the daunting journeys – within such contexts, both the objects’ physical and protective dimensions would be attractive, and their potential for eventual exchange in a distant port was perhaps also recognized (cf. Weingarten 1991). Amulets often overlap with seals in terms of their materials, forms, and corporeal positioning, suggesting that seals were most likely experienced in comparable light, as similarly interactive and animate. Indeed the distinction between seal and amulet is often difficult to assert and could, in some instances, be false (see *e.g.* Goff 1963).⁷ In Bronze Age Crete, certain theriomorphic seals were rendered in the self-same forms and materials as amulets lacking an incised base/face for creating impressions; moreover these two object types are sometimes found in the same contexts (*e.g.* in the Cretan Prepalatial tombs of the Mesara Plain, see Xanthoudidiēs 1924).

And yet seals have unique dynamics. In her consideration of numerous early Cretan seals incised with geometric and “abstract” motifs, Maria Relaki has compellingly argued that some were understood in part to possess protective or talismanic properties, securing the boundaries of both the seal wearer and the sealed item. She stresses the active dimensions of these qualities, which are potentially amuletic, but emphasizes the performative stamping of an impression as critical (Relaki 2009 with further references). Her discussion works with the specific bodily character of seals, taking their imagery, physicality, and activity together. As she recognizes, seals, in fact, had distinctively dynamic relations with persons and made particularized claims on their attentions, some of which were likely shared with amulets but others of which were not. These arose in part from their conventional involvement in the active assertion of identity and will. While these assertions certainly entailed symbolic dimensions, with seals and impressions acting as signifiers, they were far from cerebral. They came into being through practices that relied on the unique potentials of human- and object-bodies alike, as well as on the distinctive interactions they could have.

The peculiar social potential of seals can only be fully appreciated if we take seriously their existence as physical bodies and, through this, contemplate the truly distinctive relationships they had with human bodies. These relations involved engagements that were sensorially, emotionally, and socially complex. They were also highly particular, involving the specific properties of a given seal, its unique affordances, and the environments (physical, sociocultural) of which it was part. I turn now to a closer consideration of the tensely active nature of the seal-human connection, one that pulsed with the realization of both intimacy and separation.

Where bodies meet

The nature of material culture’s involvement in humans’ bodily experience has been a topic of renewed scholarly interest in recent years, especially within archaeology and other social sciences (see references above). The highly specific nature of

relations between certain objects and humans has been explored from various angles by numerous scholars who often stress the potential intimacy of the relationship. Lambros Malafouris' work concerning the fundamental role of objects in shaping the human mind stands out in this context for its strength and relevance to the present discussion (see "neuroplasticity" and "embodied mind" approaches, discussed, for example, in Malafouris 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2013a; 2013b).⁸ One specific dimension of the research developed in Malafouris' "Material Engagement" approach concerns how things (*e.g.* "clothes, jewelry, tools") can come to be experienced as elements continuous with the human body, incorporated into its active "body schema", which he describes as the "complicated neuronal network responsible for continually tracking the position of our body in space...An observation which essentially means *that objects and tools attached to the body can become part of the body as the physical body itself*" (*itals.* original, Malafouris 2008b, 9, citing Campbell 2005, Gallagher 2005; *cf.* Sennett 2008 on tool use). Indeed Malafouris frequently refers to such human-object connections as "prosthetic", clearly stressing the idea of unbroken continuity between the thing, the body and the mind (*e.g.* Malafouris 2008c; 2013b). His work stands as an exceptionally important contribution to material culture studies. It forces us to come to terms with an object's potential to be a vital part of a person's being in the world, in its simultaneous cognitive, sociocultural, and corporeal dimensions. The challenge then becomes particularizing this intimacy, moving beyond the sublime of such an incredibly powerful potential association to get a sense of how *this* object and *this* person were entangled.

Malafouris' description of these connections as "prosthetic" merits closer consideration in the case of seals and impressions. With this term, the idea of unbroken bodily unity with a thing is emphasized, such that we can "conceptualise minds and things as continuous" (Malafouris 2013b, 28). Especially given his reference to Mycenaean swords and signet rings as key examples of objects enjoying this type of connection, one would expect that seals of roughly the same time period and region would also be included in this group. Indeed the explicit sociocultural association of identity with the seal and impression would offer yet further strength to this human-object link. Yet, while in no way wishing to deny the potential for the nature and depth of association between person and object that Malafouris highlights, there are certain absolutely crucial aspects of such engagements that this approach does not address, and consequently it should be complemented by other analytical perspectives, at least when considering certain object types (such as seals). In other words, by decidedly not "retaining the boundary of the skin", Malafouris is recognizing the skin's complexity as a mindful organ, but he is not problematizing other dimensions of the skin's extraordinary sensory and emotional potential that we risk losing sight of if we do not also take it seriously as a sentient boundary.

Between seals and human seal wearers there is a critical ontological distinction, one that certainly throbs with a dynamic back-and-forth, but where an ultimately irreducible space necessarily resides, no matter how intimate their relationship might

be. Indeed, in certain respects, this space – an interface – should be recognized in other object types, as well.⁹ In a critique of Gaston Bachelard’s “prosthetic” appraisal of objects’ role in human experience,¹⁰ Bill Brown gets at the crucial experiential character of this interface when he writes, “But because he considers objects only prosthetically – as material ground for imaging the subject as such – Bachelard in fact forecloses any consideration of our intimacy with things: the way we finger watches, rosary beads, cigarettes, a favourite pen; the way toys become the interlocutors with whom children share their secrets; or the way the car or toaster assumes an ugly personality” (Brown 1998, 942). In other words, the intimacy we experience with some things resides in their simultaneous closeness and separation – if we deny or absorb that separation altogether we potentially lose our sense of the textured interactive space in which such intimate relations take their particular, realized form. This is a topic that has been considered many times, in many ways,¹¹ but at this point I wish to explore it further with regard to seals and seal impressions and their relation to persons.

The particular vibrancy of the glyptic body

As we have seen above, the seal was a body that dwelt against the human body, where a vibrant corporeal relationship took form. Yet it is also crucial to recognize a third body, always central in this interactive nexus, whether presently or implicitly: the impression. Knowledge of and experience with the impression informed the fundamental interconnection of the seal and person, and vice-versa. To put this another way, the unique dynamism of the seal’s relationship with the human body integrated the potential of the seal, in the human hand, to create this third body – an act of reproduction that necessarily involved a rupture of the closeness felt between human and seal. That kinetic rupture, or active distance generated by the impression, was in a sense always present, potential. It was part of why and how a seal was held dear, close against the skin, securing that potential and all it carried with it (especially guarding it from another human’s hand). Thus the intimacy of the immediate bodily juxtaposition of the seal and person was charged by this vital energy. It is crucial to recognize that this energy did not reside just in the impression – it was present in the seal, the *genetrix*, and arose from the flow of interaction through the human, the seal, and the impression.

With recognition of this tense, spatially complex dynamism, and its ongoing circuitry through different but intimately related bodies, comes a need to further particularize. That is because, even within the specific dynamism possessed by seals (active both within and beyond sphragistic moments), there was incredible variation in the objects’ bodily character, in the engagements they were part of and in the myriad sociocultural spaces in which they participated. These matters matter. It was within this variation that specific surfaces were known, that a person gained comfort from rubbing the smooth curve of an agate lentoid, or was agitated when a

finger encountered a new divot in the precious plane of a carnelian amygdaloid. It is also within this variation that vessels and documents were stamped and sealed shut, that oaths were made through performative acts of impression, and that heirlooms were removed from one body and pressed against new skin. In other words, the dynamism of seal use was actualized in the particularity of lived experience. One especially tricky facet of the seal's existence to consider through this lens of specific dynamism is its engraved imagery. Glyptic imagery is often implicitly discussed as if it existed separate from the objects in which it was literally hewn, thereby being isolated and treated as if it was more or less static. Of course the imagery engraved on seals and impressed in clay is always material, always physical, always particular, and always bound up in the interactive lives of the objects of which it was part. Yet analyzing and interpreting seal iconography in these dimensions – and especially to problematize the imagery not simply as being carried, but as being an active aspect of the seal's dynamism – is often quite challenging. Both Relaki (2009) and Malafouris (2008a) have offered readings of particular Aegean glyptic objects that innovatively work in this direction.¹² Certainly there are other scholars who have undertaken similarly important research in these aspects of glyptic analysis, but further discussion and investigation are still incredibly necessary. In this vein, and as a means of closing, I now briefly turn to outlining a reading of a particular grouping of Bronze Age Cretan glyptic – seals engraved with imagery of lions. My hope is that through consideration of specific objects we might better appreciate the distinctively vibrant and engaging nature of seals and impressions, and the robust implications this has for their participation in sociocultural experience. Hence I argue that it is only through such a lens that we can appreciate the poetic character of these glyptic objects and the interactions they were part of, including a crucial aspect of human-animal relations in Minoan society.

The touch of lions

Lions never roamed the Cretan countryside. They never ravaged the flocks of shepherds there, never terrorized a mountain goat and her young in the island's many highlands. Yet lions were vividly present in the material culture of Bronze Age Crete, entering the scene early on, in the Early Bronze Age or "Prepalatial" period, and remaining a prominent figure throughout the Minoan palatial phases. Moreover, lions had a striking pride of place within the realm of elite material culture. They were favourite subjects for the precious art of seal engraving, their monumental forms, rendered in minute scale, ultimately residing on the bodies of persons whose actions enriched the social, cultural, and political life of the island. Indeed, seals are one of the only object types through which the lion was given form in Minoan Crete, with very few examples existing in other media. Thus in the absence of living lions present on the island, physical encounters between lions and persons were limited to interactions with seals and seal impressions.

The restriction of lions to glyptic objects would have keenly impacted the notion of the beast and how it was experienced on Minoan Crete. Most fundamentally it meant that the leonine would always have been understood in conjunction with the human, their relationship being absolutely fundamental to the beast's identity; in turn, the lion's formative character would have come to inform the identity of those persons with whom it was juxtaposed. This mutual relationship played out through bodily engagements. Spatially and conceptually, the lion was persistently tethered to the human, either being physically strapped to a person's flesh as a seal worn, held in her hand as a seal impressed, or travelling away as an impression released. The impression's physical definition was articulated through the intimate momentary interaction that took place between the person, seal, and moist clay, and its resultant form mapped the fine physical contours of the seal's face – hence the impression was a third material thing whose rises and falls rendered both the seal and the bodily sealing act vividly present in their absence (see Anderson 2016). The corporeal relation of person, seal, and impression was thus tense and dynamic, taking place over time and space, each body distinct yet implicated in the other. It is here, in this charged space, that the Cretan lion dwelt.

The touch of these Cretan lions developed over time. In the earliest examples of Cretan lion glyptic, from the later Early Bronze Age, we find the beasts engraved into cylindrical sections of imported hippopotamus teeth that had been cut for use as stamp seals. These gently ridged ivory cylinders had flat ends, where the softer inner tissue of the tooth was exposed (Fig 14.4). It was here that the engraving was made. Most of the motifs involved multiple lions progressing head-to-tail around the circular face of the seal. Given the softness of the material, the engraving tends to be somewhat deep, such that the contours of the lions' forms would have been readily appreciable with a fingertip. We currently have some forty examples of glyptic objects engraved or impressed with such imagery, stemming from sites across the island; collectively they are known as the "Parading Lions" group. No doubt the establishment of this widely distributed iconography was an extremely significant sociocultural occurrence (Anderson 2016). The wide distribution meant that the seals were likely a powerfully recognized material form and identity marker; yet at the same time few persons would have been in the social position to possess one. Each of these seals was pierced to be suspended by a string, and they were likely hung around their possessors' necks. Here the weight of the ivory chunk would have been felt by the wearer, an assurance of its secure presence, while the seal's distinctive toothy form would be noted by others. As it was suspended, the engraved face of the seal, carrying the lions, would not have consistently been visible. Moreover, as anyone who has studied glyptic knows, when directly inspecting the face of a seal the legibility of the engraved imagery is limited, even under the artificially idealized circumstances orchestrated for analysis. Impressions potentially offer much improved glimpses of a seal's imagery. When encountering a person wearing one of these ivory cylinders, some people no doubt would have recalled previous experiences when

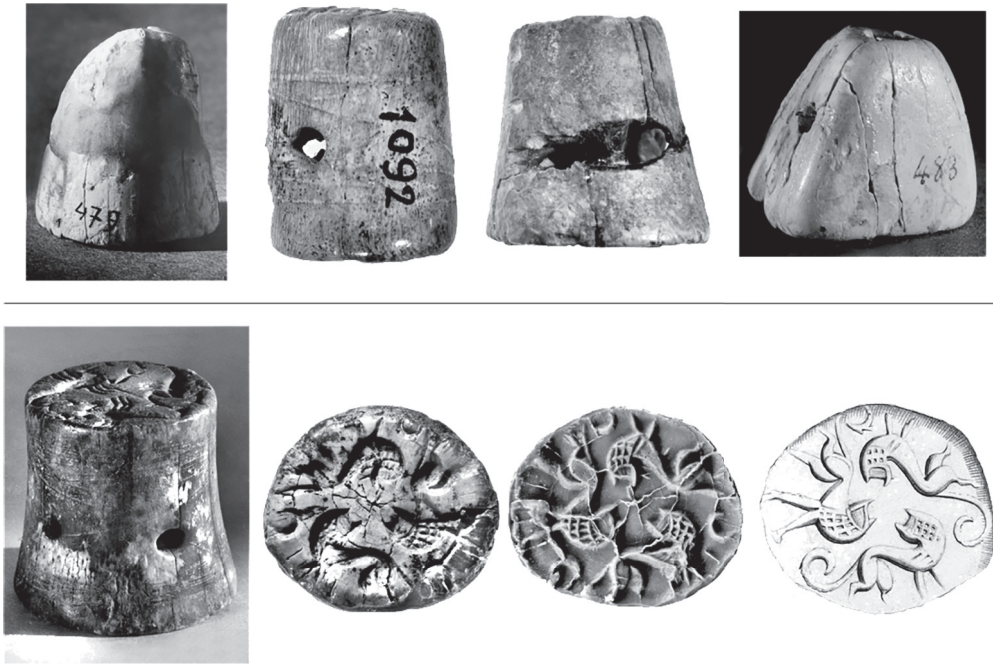


Fig. 14.4 Examples of the “Parading Lions” group from Prepalatial Crete, rendered of imported hippopotamus teeth. Top row, L-R: CMS II.1.51, Ayia Triada; CMS II.1.300, Platanos; CMS II.1.396, Gournes; CMS II.1.55, Ayia Triada. Bottom row, L-R: CMS III.248, Platanos, seal, seal face, impression, drawing (images reproduced courtesy of the *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*, Institut für Klassische Archäologie, Universität Heidelberg).

they had observed a seal of comparable appearance stamping a lion’s form in clay, thereby being able to mentally associate a lion with the seal presently in front of them. This interpretive loop re-emphasizes the perpetuated interconnectedness of the seal, wearer, and impression, through which each element could be involved in a person’s engagement with the other.

The situation is complicated, and enriched, if we take seriously the reality that each seal was in fact a tooth. While most persons living in Crete, including both seal possessors and others, never would have seen living lions or hippopotami in the flesh, they certainly would have seen animal teeth – and been able to readily recognize them as such. The sectioning of the ivory used for the seals may have rendered the specific macro-morphological features of the hippopotamus tooth obscure, but the fact that it was a tooth would have been clear. It is then very likely that in Cretans’ minds this extraordinarily sized tooth was associated with the lions engraved within it – hence these teeth may have been experienced as *lions’* teeth (see Anderson 2016). In semiotic terms, this would have brought an indexical or metonymic role to the seal. But in a more concrete sense, it embedded the beast, as the seal, within the immediate

present of Cretan sociocultural contexts in a very distinctive and powerful way. The seal embodied both a facet of the (once) living lion's body (the tooth) and a fabricated incarnation of that body (the engraved lion)¹³ – in this way the tooth would have been experienced in unity with the imagery sunk into it. Together they manifested a unique leonine corporeality, which at the same time was also a thing with great sociocultural efficacy. A large tooth is an awesome thing, inevitably invoking a sense of an even larger beast. The people who saw or touched one of these seals on the body of another would no doubt have been impacted by its physical and emotional dimensions, and by its ability to sink in and leave a mark. For the seal possessor herself, this tooth – a most impressive element of another body – was felt against her own warm flesh. Here it was keenly proximate and familiar while also ever cool, distinct, and perhaps intimidating.

Over the two or three hundred years of their use and manufacture, as the Parading Lions seals became increasingly established sociocultural forms, people likely would have come to associate the lion – as imaged in the engraving on the seal and imagined therewith – with the distinctive ivory form of these seals even if they had not actually observed one being used sphragistically (the lion iconography is indeed one of the principal motif types found on these cylinders). The material of the seal, a large incisor, would have emphasized and formulated this association with lions in a very particular, concrete way. Within local communities and even emergent regional ones, it is entirely possible that people knew which prominent persons were in possession of these extraordinary seals. The lion would have been caught up in these formative identities, *their* bodies residing in intimate juxtaposition to the bodies of human community leaders. Moreover, through stamped impressions, the form of the lion would have come to be accepted as a legitimate substitute for these persons and their active agency. Thus the dynamism of glyptic objects, their distinctive affordances, movements, and bodily interrelations, animated the identity of the lion and its relations to people. With this, the lion was experienced as having real sociocultural presence within highly significant contexts of interaction.

Lions continued to be engraved on Cretan seals throughout the course of the Bronze Age. Through this time, the materials used for the seals, the shape of the objects, the particular formation of the beast's engraved body, and the compositional details of their rendering all developed. So, too, did the sociocultural life of the island. As we have seen, these are all hugely significant factors that impacted the character of people's engagement with seals, and thus with lions, in highly important ways. An analysis at this scale must be reserved for another context, but briefly assuming a long diachronic view nevertheless could be instructive. The relationship of lions and humans is of course a well-studied topic in the scholarship of early Greece. It has been most celebrated and analyzed in the similes of the Homeric epics, especially the *Iliad*. These stories, which we know in forms most likely dating to the Iron Age, are widely believed to have origins in the oral narratives of the Bronze Age Aegean (e.g. West 1988; Nagy 1996, 109–112). Such stories undoubtedly would have

been active in the Cretan communities where lion glyptic was crafted and engaged with. As the tales were sung and listened to, they would have contributed to the characterization of the beast in dialogue with the seal imagery. Like the juxtapositions of the epic simile, the relationship between lion and person generated by the seals was fundamentally poetic. It was a paralleling of beings that was rendered emotional and animate through its particular physicality. Given that these Cretan seals stand as the earliest attestations of the lion that we have in the creative culture of the Aegean, the juxtaposition they so eloquently formulate might indeed be a root in the long, fluid, and extraordinary poetic tradition that we celebrate in its later incarnations. It was the inherent and distinctive dynamism of seals that gave this juxtaposition its poignant character, and through which the lion found its place alongside the Aegean body.

The relationships glyptic objects had with people were fundamentally bodily. Their distinctive inter-corporeality empowered the objects not only in their sphragistic roles, but in the fullness of their participation in lived social experience. It was both the specific material character of seals and impressions and their peculiarly active and relational dynamics that empowered these things to so uniquely inform the broader contours of people's sociocultural life – from its political to poetic dimensions.

Notes

- 1 The author would like to express her thanks to Diamantis Panagiotopoulos and Maria Anastasiadou at the Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel in Heidelberg for their generosity with the Aegean glyptic imagery and their wealth of relevant knowledge.
- 2 We cannot know with certainty how regularly a seal possessor wore his or her seal in Bronze Age Crete. That said, the seals often show considerable physical wear in their string holes indicating frequent suspension on the body. It seems most likely that they were often strapped onto the person – as a matter of security, identity, and habit (and we have seen that the strong bodily association of a person and seal established in this way would have subtended the semiotics of seal use). Even if we imagine restricted wear, only at certain times, *e.g.* during specific public or administrative activities, the fundamental link of seal and person would still be emphasized through these key moments of being seen and felt together.
- 3 Moreover, within a community, it was likely not just a seal that one recognized on a person's body, but *her* seal (or his), *i.e.* it was recognized as a particular seal possessed by a particular person. In such instances, people would have had a specific knowledge of the person wearing the seal, and hence identified the object as a specific one, even if viewing it from a distance. In this way, the seal was deeply associated with the acting person by others, as well as by the wearer herself.
- 4 For example, in many premodern cultures, including within the ancient Aegean, colour seems to have been experienced as a vitalistic aspect of matter, active, fluid, potentially bodily, and powerful as it unfolded in a given context (see Classen 2012, 127–129; Stager 2012). With this, it is not simply that one's appreciation of a seal's colour might result in its being viewed as more valuable or "elite", but that directly experiencing the colour's phenomenal occurrence in the object may have been thought to impact the person beholding it himself, in a way generally akin to Classen's discussion of the stained glass windows of churches in the Middle

- Ages that would have been felt “to radiate colour energies or ‘virtues’” on those beholding them (Classen 2012, 128, citing Gage 1993, 70–73).
- 5 In skillful hands, drills permitted incredible precision when densely filing a surface with fine incisions or modelling the contours of a cut. They also could be used to produce highly regular circular motifs, solid dots sunk into the seal face as well as concentric rings.
 - 6 Cf. Kotansky 1994 for Greek inscribed amulets.
 - 7 See especially “Cylinder Seals and Amulets” within Goff 1963.
 - 8 Much of Malafouris’ work builds upon research in cultural neuroscience indicating that a person’s mind fluidly forms through the body’s ongoing interactions with the phenomenal world. He argues that the implications of this work for the role of objects in the cognitive life of the human are profound: “if the body shapes the mind then it is inevitable that the material culture that surrounds that body will shape the mind also” (2008b, 3).
 - 9 It is worth stating that Malafouris naturally would also – and indeed *does* – discuss the point of contact between person and thing as an “interface”; the question is whether this is taken as a point where that contact defies a bodily distinction.
 - 10 Bachelard (1957) certainly does not use the term in the self-same sense as does Malafouris. That said, a comparable risk is present: that the object is analytically subsumed in the person and hence the textured character of the interaction between the two distinct bodies is missed.
 - 11 See an especially apt collective rumination through the pages of *Archaeological Dialogues* 14(1).
 - 12 Relaki’s discussion of the potential protective/boundary-forming role of some Cretan seals, activated through performance, is a powerful example of such analysis. She offers a compelling understanding of the seals that takes their engraved imagery as part of the objects’ distinctive affordances (Relaki 2009; see above). Working from a rather different angle, Malafouris likewise integrates the efficacy of the image and the thing in his discussion of a Mycenaean signet ring engraved with imagery of a warrior. Here he considers the potential mnemonic efficacy of the image as a culturally specific component of the object’s ability to contribute to the sensory experience of human remembering (Malafouris 2008a).
 - 13 Hence the seal would have stood in both an indexical and an iconic relationship to the lion, according to Peircean semiotics.

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Chapter 15

The phenomenology and sensory experience of dress in Mesopotamia: the embodiment of discomfort and pain through dress

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Abstract

The use of phenomenology, which poses a dialectic between objects and humans, to explore the significance and meaning of dress objects and practices promises to provide a fruitful new method for studying dress in the ancient world. Phenomenology and sensory studies together allow material culturists to explore how dress objects felt when bodies moved in the world. The combination of a Merleau-Pontian concept of embodiment and Joanne Entwistle's fashion theory allows a consideration of the phenomenology of dress objects in Mesopotamia, a venue with an abundance of archaeological, pictorial, and textual evidence. An analysis of some of this evidence for dress in Mesopotamia that focuses especially on how ancient humans experienced pain through and with dress shows how the application of a phenomenological approach can move the study of dress beyond its relationship to identity.¹

Dress is a phenomenon involved in a dialectic² of self and other, and such a dialectic is the central concern of phenomenology. Dress,³ and the acts of dressing and undressing, can be analyzed methodologically as a series of actions and behaviors performing within the realms of lived human experience and subjectivity. This contribution is intended as a consideration of methodologies used for understanding dress in the ancient world, rather than a heavily empirical exploration of a particular space and time in which to study dress. However, the methodology that I embrace here can be (and has been recently) deployed to explore embodied practices and lived experiences as individuals constructed and adjusted their social and personal identities within specific moments or spaces. In other words, I am investigating the phenomenology of dress, the subjective experiences of Mesopotamians when they dressed and undressed and were immobile or moved as dressed bodies. This speaks to dressing and undressing as practices concerned with identity to be sure, but also with the lived experiences

of daily life, and acknowledges a diversity of approaches to dress, as identified by Laura Gawlinski and Megan Cifarelli (2018). A focus on the experiences of pain as evoked through and by dress allows an accessible lens to explore the ways that a phenomenological approach to dress can add complexity and nuance to an overall understanding of ancient dress and dress practices and ultimately humanity. I argue that pain and pleasure are universal bodily experiences through which we moderns can connect and empathize with past humans, therefore the ideas, emotions, and sensory perceptions that dress evokes are partially accessible through our modern experiences with dress. Furthermore, greater Mesopotamia, broadly understood to include the neighboring areas of the Levant and Iran, is a perfect venue in which to analyze dress as a phenomenological undertaking due to the abundance of texts and representations of dressed bodies, as well as the archaeological evidence that has survived, even scantily. Thus in the following discussion, I attempt to explore the possibility of a phenomenological approach to dress for Mesopotamia, with various examples of the experience of pain through dress, including a closer look at the Hasanlu dress material, as an illustration of how such an approach might work.

Since many contributions to this volume focus on the relationship of dress to identity formation and human agency, a phenomenological approach to dress can also help to understand how ancient peoples lived with and in dress. Indeed, phenomenology's central scope of focus – the dialectic between self/subject and the world-out-there/object has been a concern of humans since deep antiquity. I understand that there are problems with applying our modern idea of self-consciousness and “I” to Mesopotamian civilization, but there is no denying that our bodies are not dramatically physiologically or physically different than those of the ancients. In a recent article in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Matthew Johnson defined phenomenology neatly for archaeologists as “the study of the structures of human experience and consciousness” (2012, 272). Furthermore, a phenomenological approach in archaeology finds its origins in post-processual archaeology led by Christopher Tilley (1994) and critiques the idea that material culture can be read a single way – for example as solely communicative of identity.

Phenomenology is a philosophical term, coming out of 19th- and 20th-century German intellectual movements; some contend that we who study the ancient world ought to avoid using the term since it is anachronistically modern (Johnson 2012, 270). A phenomenological understanding admits that human experience with the world is “not simple or commonsensical” (*ibid.*). Critics of phenomenological archaeology argue that the self-conscious abstractions in which the topic is discussed by modern philosophers renders the inquiry anachronistic. On the contrary, I have found that phenomenology as an approach to ancient bodies and dress provokes an invigorating “shift in the consciousness of response” for understanding ancient humans (Hay 2010, 13). When coupled with another approach to lived experience and the body, sensory studies, a phenomenological interpretation of dress can further the cause of reconstructing ancient lives and cultures. We cannot deny that the electro-

chemical reactions, which involved sensory stimuli, receptors, pathways, and areas in the brain that process, interpret, and respond to such information, are the same. Thus, consideration of phenomenology and sensory experience, though grounded in biophysics, “allows us empathy with the past” (Harries 2017, 113).

However, a bit of caution is necessary, as these contexts of phenomenological experience are not universally experienced by humans. How each individual’s brain receives, processes, and responds to such stimuli varies greatly by individual and social context, and this is also important to acknowledge and consider. Beate Pongratz Leisten and Karen Sonick argue that the meanings about things constructed by humans must be grounded in the consideration of both the materiality of objects recovered and the mental and imaginative frameworks of the individual in their society (2015, 6). In other words, we can try to understand how ancient “I”s experienced things, as long as we understand the social, physical, and ideological contexts in which the individuals were moving, thinking, and feeling. Ultimately, phenomenology, sensory studies, and dress intersect in that they are all interested in bodies, and how bodies experienced and sensed the world. These approaches all also have in common that they often explicitly engage the term embodiment.

The fashion theorist, Joanne Entwistle, suggests that we have to understand dress in society as not just an apparatus applied upon a passive body by cultural structures (as Foucault argued). Nor can dress be understood as merely reflective – a set of symbol-signs – of societal ideas and rules (2013, 12–13). Rather, she argues that we adopt a Merleau-Pontian (1945/2012) notion of dress through his phenomenological concept of embodiment, which holds that our sense of being-in-the-world (a Heideggerian phrase) is established by our bodies in more than empirical physiological ways. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Entwistle understand bodies as constantly in movement within different “spaces” – physical, emotional, social – and that dress is experienced as a series of acts, of practices, such as getting dressed, feeling, and moving with dress, and getting undressed, as we move through these spaces. These practices are in turn culturally conditioned – we are pre-conditioned socially to respond in certain ways – and therefore interpreted by the individual through their daily lived experience. Entwistle insists that humans are always “body-conscious”, that is they recognize what their bodies feel like when they live, sense, and move in space and time – and especially when such spaces change. A phenomenological and sensory approach asks questions of evidence related to “how the garment was worn, how the garment moved when on the body, what it sounded like when it moved and how it felt to the wearer” (Entwistle 2000, 8).

The phenomenological approach holds that dress objects are not separate from and superficially applied to the body, lacking utility, but are objects that critically change and interact affectively with the body/self. Dress objects are far from useless, rather they perform work for, with, in, and as the body. This conception of dress objects springs in part from the ideas of Alfred Gell (1998), who argued that objects with certain aesthetic values, which he calls “art”, have agency – that they make

tangible the past actions of “the long-ago people who made and used them” (Harries 2017, 120). Arguing against Gell, material culturists critique the rather Eurocentric idea that objects and “art” may be classified differently by other cultures. Rather all objects should be considered together as not merely indexing human agency, but they also possess their own agency, since the things also actively change the people who engage with them (*ibid*). In this ironic way, we risk anthropomorphizing objects as having human qualities, as almost animated. The risk can be mediated, however, when we consider that in the pre-modern and non-Western worlds, the agency of objects need not only be ascribed by humans. For Mesopotamians it is precisely in the interaction with anything outside of themselves, whether human or divine, that objects become animated in the dance of phenomenology.

The Mesopotamian evidence, which includes the extant objects, and representations or discussions of those objects in texts, images, and other forms, and even the absence of dress objects, can illuminate this phenomenological concept of dress. Dress objects now filling museums worldwide, excavated from known archaeological contexts such as buildings and graves in Mesopotamia, accompanied by their references and representations in other evidence, can show how dress items interacted with and informed experiences of pain in greater Mesopotamia. Elsewhere (Thomason *forthcoming*), I explore other case studies of dress objects and their embodiment, including those related to self-care (formerly known as “toilet and cosmetic” items), and the wearing of dress items that physically affected bodily comportment, posture, and movement, such as heavy and multi-faceted jewellery ensembles, and undergarments. Here, I engage exclusively with the most basic aspect and perhaps accessible aspect of embodied dress: its relationship to comfort or discomfort, and pain. The ideas surrounding the experience of pain and its relationship to dress are a logical point from which to start studying the phenomenology of dress, as psychologists agree that experiences involving pain are universal.⁴ It is the dressologist’s task to demonstrate that there is a direct connection between dress and the human embodiment of pain. Dress items and discussions or representations of them from Mesopotamia can certainly add more evidence for case studies that seek to understand the complexity of the embodied experience of dress and its relationship to pain across time and space in human history.

Modern psychological studies have produced surveys that conclude that getting dressed and dress choices can affect one’s mood or emotions (and the reciprocal moods can affect dress choices and ways of wearing). The idea that humans experience pain differently and separately through their bodies and minds is entirely modern, and therefore anachronistic when applied to the pre-modern past. The study of emotion and its effect on human agency has recently become a focus of historical and archaeological research, in what some are calling the “Emotional Turn” for the disciplines.⁵ What we might call “emotions” were very much embodied in Mesopotamian culture, as they were thought to have been caused literally by demons or other divine interventions entering, possessing, and leaving the body. Furthermore,

the seat of emotions, which we now know is lodged in the brain even if prompted by sensory stimuli in the body, was thought to have been located by many ancient cultures, including Egypt and Mesopotamia, in the torso or abdomen. The brain was considered a useless mush of jelly by these cultures. The separation of emotions from the body (or inner from outer or brain from body) therefore does not hold up in the Mesopotamian context.

For modern humans, surveys of British women in the last decade by psychologist Karen Pine (2014) found that when they were depressed, adult women tended to don baggier tops, and this choice was related to a negative self-image caused by the depressive mood. A dressologist would explore the underlying specific context of the moment: how this dress choice and its psychological or emotional affects relates to body image and concepts of ideal feminine beauty in the contemporary British world. So while we can instinctively relate to how a mood affects dress and vice-versa, and how a woman might feel in a baggier blouse about and in her body, we still need to contextually situate those linkages in the contemporaneous cultural context. It is possible to make these sensory and cultural linkages for Mesopotamia, with the aid of texts and images, even when the archaeological presence of dress objects (especially textiles, less so jewellery) is nonexistent. Moods, or emotions such as depression, are now known to derive from biochemical reactions in the brain brought on by language, memories, and sensory stimuli. But a pre-neurological understanding of the bodily experiences of discomfort and pain and their relation to dress, certainly existed in Mesopotamia.

To endure or be free from pain was a natural goal of Mesopotamians and indeed all humans. The medical historian, Thomas Dormandy, writes: "Pain and ways of overcoming it are deeply embedded in civilization and culture. They are also inescapably part of everybody's personal experience" (2006, 5). This human desire for a pain-free existence is witnessed by the thousands of magico-medical and other texts citing specific locations of bodily pain and attempts to get rid of it (Scurlock and Coleman 1997; Pangas 1999; Geller and Finkel 2006; Fales 2009).⁶ Mesopotamians believed that disease, ill health, and their associated pains, were caused by angry gods, their demonistic helpers, or unsettled ancestral ghosts inhabiting the body. Treatments for illness, disease, and pain included magical, ritual, pharmacological, and surgical interventions. The alleviation of pain through magic (Akkadian *asûtu*) or pharmacological/medical treatment (*āšipûtu*), was understood as not simply relief from harmful or annoying symptoms, but more importantly as a necessity for happiness in one's life in relation to the gods (Biggs 2005, 4). Thus, the therapeutic intervention to relieve a painful symptom of a disease was also its cure, as the combination of *asûtu* and *āšipûtu* practices were deployed in tandem by a healer or exorcist priest. As Robert Biggs suggests, "an ideal in Babylonia was to enjoy good health and to have contentment, to be viewed favourably by the gods and fellow humans, and to enjoy a long life with one's descendants" (2005, 2).

In Mesopotamia, the wearing of items of dress or body modification could relieve the body of pain and its magical cause, and this is certainly the case when amulets

and seals were worn apotropaically or used in healing and medical rituals. A “fitting” example of relating an item of dress to the relief of pain is an inscribed carnelian stamp seal from the Kassite period in southern Mesopotamia (c. 1400–1200 BCE), obviously an heirloom, which was found on the body of Sargon II’s Queen Ataliyā in her tomb dating to the 1st millennium BCE at Nimrud. She or her scribes added the inscription “from the head(dress) of Kurigalzu” to the object. Other seals found in her tomb have labels such as “for relief of pain in the head...” inscribed upon them (al-Rawi 2008; Hussein, *et al.* 2016, 14). Clearly, the antiquity and the materials of these seal stones not only warded off or ridded the body of the evil demons of disease, but also were thought to have relieved bodily pain (al-Gailani Weir 2008; Gansell 2018).⁷ In a related phenomenon, there are numerous textual references within magical, medical, and healing tablets that prescribe the wearing of amulets applied directly to a sore body part to get rid of pain and its demonic component. For example, a text from the city of Ashur in Assyria, which describes a series of healing rituals in the series *muššu’u*, instructs the healer to string “strong amulet stones together”, and then place or rub them on sore muscles while uttering spells: “to loosen evil muscle – stones for his left arm” (Böck 2003, 7). After the rubbing ritual, these amulets were strung on threads knotted around the wrist,⁸ and were thought to repel evil from the body. In other parts of this ritual series, textiles encircling the sickbed (although it is not clear if they are garments) and trapping the demon are summoned in conjunction with other materials to rid the patient of pain and evil: “You wrap red wool around the bed. As soon as you have done this you burn incense” (*ibid.*). Similarly, though the pain of menstrual cramps or childbirth is not directly discussed in medical texts, Mesopotamian cylinder seals made of specific stones (*e.g.* carnelian or hematite) were placed into bodily openings to stop the abnormal flow of bodily liquids, including high volume menstrual blood (Steinert 2012). In this case, the multivalent contexts and use of objects in Mesopotamia deserves recognition as our modern categories for understanding the function and meaning of objects do not always work. If magico-medical texts are taken *verbatim* (and there are critiques of this method), the cylinder seals, which were typically worn externally on the body for many reasons related to dress, when deployed internally in the body to stop pain, cease to be considered “dress items” at all. Furthermore, these cylinder seals become part of the body, intertwined with physiological and tactile processes.

At the very least, we might argue that relief from pain was certainly a concern of Mesopotamians, but equally important was the pursuit of comfort, or freedom from discomfort. British historian John Crowley defines comfort as “a self-conscious satisfaction with the relationship between one’s body and the immediate physical environment” (1999, 750). General comfort was also a genuine concern of Mesopotamians, especially, and perhaps only, in the case of the quality of textiles for garments. Greater Mesopotamia, after all, was the site of the oldest weaving technologies in the world, and these civilizations developed an extremely long

tradition (upwards of 5,000 years) of producing and consuming different types of woollen and linen textiles. Texts about textile production and consumption throughout time and space in Mesopotamia attest to a recognition that some fabrics were of better quality than others.⁹ For example, a trader from Ashur selling his family's textiles in Kanesh in Anatolia (c. 1850 BCE) wrote to his wife/producer that the garment she produces for the sale must meet market demand for a certain level of comfort of tactile sensation:

Make sure that only one side of the textiles is combed, and it shouldn't be sheared. The weave should be dense. Compared to the textiles that you sent me before, add a *mina* of wool to each (of the other textiles) and make sure that they're thin! The other side should be lightly combed, and if it is slightly hairy, then it will turn out like one of those *kutanum*-textiles (Veenhof 1972, 104; Michel 2001, 444–445; Thomason 2013, 100).

Inventory lists of offerings to deities, dowries, and many other legal and economic texts in Mesopotamia also listed individual textiles or garments (most often wool, but occasionally linen) as anywhere from first to fifth quality, depending on the quality of raw material, the tightness of the weave, and most importantly, the amount of labour that went into producing and finishing the pieces (Waerzeggers 2006; Firth 2013, 143; Wasserman 2013). The tassels and tiny bits of fabric evidence from the Nimrud royal tombs that have been preserved were from super-finely woven fibres of polished flax linen still holding their sheen almost 3,000 years later (Fig. 15.1). They must have been supremely smooth to the touch, acceptable for royal wearers as markers of high status, and of course, soft on the skin (Crowfoot 2008). So too, texts from a Neo-Babylonian private archive indicate that the finishing process applied to garments included fulling the cloth, sometimes with fine oils to soften it (Firth 2013, 142), and colouring it with solutions of water and natural dyes (Gaspa 2013). The last step was often to pick or “comb” the fabric, thus eliminating any scratchy inclusions and creating a thicker, fluffier feel, as indicated by words for “soft garment” in the Akkadian repertoire of the 1st millennium BCE.

If dress items could alleviate pain or provide comfort, they could also cause pain for their wearers. I argue that for Mesopotamians, dress contributed to both the attainment of painlessness (or at least the hope thereof) and the imposition of pain. One manner in which dress and pain intersect in and on the Mesopotamian body is through the practice of scarification, cranial deformation, and tattooing. There is early evidence for the use of these practices in Mesopotamia, primarily from female ceramic figurines dating to the Halaf period (c. 5000–4000 BCE). These figures have exaggerated, pointed heads as well as various stripes, dots, and lines painted, incised on or applied to the torso and limbs, whose pubic regions are also delineated. Similar examples appear around the same time in the Chalcolithic period in the Levant, and of course ethnographic analogies abound in anthropological literature for this region and elsewhere (Fox 1995; Joffe *et al.* 2001). Although this evidence must be analyzed with

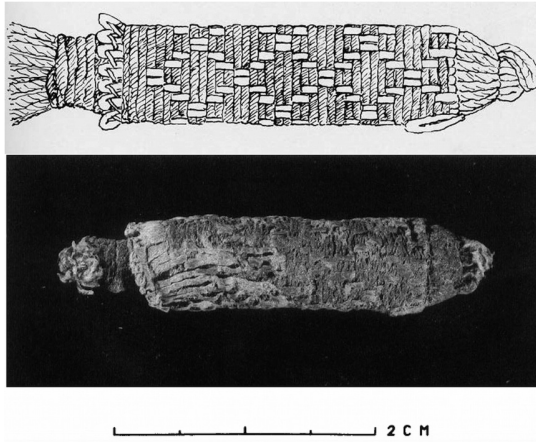


Fig. 15.1 Linen tassel from the royal tombs, Nimrud, Northwest Palace (photo: after Crowfoot et al. 1995, fig. 4).

two kilograms (Hussein et al. 2016, pls 74–75, 125) (Plate 15.1). Josephine Verduci has argued that such heavy bangles served to mark rites of passage and provided vivid noise when worn in the Iron Age Levant (2017). Ethnographic analogies suggest that anklets and bracelets can then “‘grow into’ and become fixed on the body” when worn for extended periods of time without removal (Green 2007, 295). While we do not know for certain that the Nimrud jewellery was worn in life, we can point to the Neo-Assyrian wall reliefs that show such items – thick bangles and anklets, diadems with counterweights, and heavy drop earrings – adorning both elite men and women. The wearers must have felt the heaviness of such objects. In some cases the artists of the reliefs from Ashurnasirpal II’s reign depicted the ends of the bracelets “cutting into” the flesh of the royal wrist or arm (Fig. 15.2). This effect could be a result of the technique of carving in low relief – as it is certainly more pronounced on some figures than on others – but it could also reflect the recognition and choices made by the artisans of the perfect fit and heavy weight of the bangles, and of the voluminous strength of the king’s muscles. However, more than just a symbolic code, the representation in stone of the bracelet’s relationship with the flesh of the king could bring forth a “viewer’s” own somatic memories and experiences of the weight and touch of such dress items on their bodies.¹⁰

As another relationship between dress and pain, the size and weight of extra-large garment pins worn by elites at Hasanlu in Iran, as discussed by Megan Cifarelli and Michael Danti (2015), would have limited or dramatically affected an individual’s gate and carriage – and made them acutely aware of what they were wearing, in addition to signalling to viewers near and far about the relevance of such items to personal and communal identity. The site of Hasanlu consists of an acropolis with a number of elite buildings burned from a conflagration during an enemy attack, as well as cemeteries.

extreme caution, it is conceivable that a broader Near Eastern practice of potentially painful body modification related to ideology, religion, and gender existed.

Such bodily modifications, at least at their inception, must have caused in some cases extreme pain, and perhaps even infection-related disease. However, general discomfort due to the wearing of dress items was probably a more common phenomenon. The weight of some anklets or bracelets, worn individually or in pairs, found in the queens’ tombs at Nimrud exceeds



Fig. 15.2 Relief of Ashurnasirpal II from Nimrud, Northwest Palace (photo: Public Domain, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 32.143.4, Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr.).

Michelle Marcus pointed out (excuse the pun) that the pins found on destruction “victims” from a burned building ranged in length from 5 to 13 cm, and they were worn in pairs at the shoulders with their points facing up, aimed at the face (Marcus 1994, 4) (Fig. 15.3). The so-called “shroud-pins” worn by people in death in the cemetery were even larger, 13 to 36 cm. Excavators also found a few large pins near unsexed skeletons in the burned buildings at Hasanlu. Danti and Cifarelli (2015) argue that the assignation of sex based on skeletal remains is problematic at Hasanlu and thus must be approached carefully; there is much more work to do concerning gender, life, and death for the Hasanlu inhabitants. While the archaeological sample of objects is small and their findspots difficult to calculate with the existing excavation records, at the very least, the number, position, and length of the garment pins worn by elite individuals at Hasanlu could have made them acutely aware of what they were wearing and how they moved. In addition, Cifarelli’s analysis of the skeletal remains associated with the long pins suggests that those individuals who possessed such militarized symbols suffered from less physical abuse at the hands of other people – they were protected. Conversely, while the martial pins were a constant reminder of the potential for pain that such dress objects could incur upon their wearers, the garment pins also reminded the human wearers and audience of their protective function and high status (Cifarelli 2017, 114). Finally, when worn, they may have provided some sort of comfort, or freedom from anxiety, to their wearers as the pins evoked a feeling or hope that they were safe from attack. This complex understanding



Fig. 15.3 Skeleton with long garment pin, from excavations at Hasanlu, Iran (photo: courtesy of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania).

of dress objects supports the idea that to ancient people, pain was a full body experience, involving skin, bones, flesh, and brains.

Unlike disease-related pain, pain experienced in the context of war did not distinguish between a clothed or nude body when it inhabited its victims. The exhibition of dead and mutilated bodies in Mesopotamian images was decidedly not linked to dress or undress, but we can imagine the nude or clothed dead enemies invoked some sort of pleasure or even a bodily memory of their own pain, in the viewing audiences of such violent images. Furthermore, the connection between dress and bodily defeat was present as a *topos* in some texts. While not always displayed in images, royal inscriptions from the Neo-Assyrian period proclaim that the dress of foreign rulers was plundered during battles. This act of symbolically denuding enemy rulers served to reinforce the utter defeat and humiliation of Assyria's enemies. In their annals, Assyrian kings refer to capturing the "royal paraphernalia" of the defeated enemy ruler, sometimes followed by a list of specific items

considered part of royal dress ensemble, including garments, parasols, and crowns (Gaspa 2018, 318). While this approach to Mesopotamian images relies more on a straight iconographic rather than phenomenological methodology, both methods lead to the conclusion that any experience of pain related to dress is subjective and contextually mediated.

The approaches and examples discussed here show that a phenomenological approach to dress and acknowledgement of sensorial experiences contributes to our understanding of past lives. With the explicit assumption that human bodies move and sense in similar ways, we can imagine – indeed evocatively – how dress was experienced by those living, breathing bodies in the distant past. Dress was deployed and employed by individuals on the great stage of identity performance, but dress also affected, enticed, and coerced those bodies in numerous ways, thus eliding the division between self and world-out-there. Through a focused lens on pain and its relationship to dress, we can approach and empathize with Mesopotamian lived experiences and embodied moments. This phenomenological reading of pain from archaeological, textual, and pictorial evidence of dress forces the conclusion that the sensory experience can be evoked and embodied through dress and its associated material culture.

Notes

- 1 The author wishes to thank Megan Cifarelli, the anonymous reviewers, as well as the copy-editors at Oxbow for their astute and timely remarks on drafts of this chapter.
- 2 By dialectic, I mean the dynamic, mutually affective relationship between an individual and the world outside of their somatic selves.
- 3 Of course, as dress is today broadly defined, I am concerned not just with garments, but with dress items worn on the body that were not textiles, such as jewellery, weapons, etc. Often, these extra-textile additives or modifications of a body are described as “adornment”. The term “adornment” as distinct from “dress” connotes parts of dress that do not involve textiles, such as objects placed on the body not to cover it, but to enhance it. However, I find it a troubling term, as it implies in modern consciousness a quality of uselessness (much like the term “decorative”). The word “adornment” derives from “ornament”, a term fraught with art historical denigration as a “suspicious form of vacuous decoration” (Hay 2010, 10). While I do not intend here to discuss the historiography of the term “ornament”, one cannot utilize the term today without acknowledgement of its inescapable historical baggage (Lee 2015). Since Adolf Loos proclaimed architectural “decoration” as useless and even criminal in 1910 (Loos 1910; Stewart 2000; Long 2009), I argue that dressologists should therefore jettison the words “adornment” and “ornament” from their vocabulary.
- 4 And indeed extend back to our evolutionary relatives before the existence of primates and mammals (Dormandy 2006).
- 5 This case study is restricted to physical pain, and therefore does not necessarily delve into the emotional perceptions entangled in these sensorial stimuli, although such a dichotomy probably did not exist in the ancient world (Dormandy 2006, 10). The “Emotional Turn” has indeed arrived for historians and archaeologists: see especially Rendu-Loisel 2016; Downes *et al.* 2018; Tarlow 2000; Harris and Sørensen 2010; Zwickel 2011; and Kipfer 2017.
- 6 A singular semantic parallel for the English word “pain” does not exist in Akkadian. The Mesopotamians had several equivalents in Akkadian for bodily problems eliciting complaint or reaction and requiring alleviation. Each Akkadian word was associated, in different periods, with a particular body part, or cause, *e.g.* *siḫiltu*, “sting, thorn, or pain” (CDA 322) or *ḫūṣu*, “stomach pain” (CDA 123).
- 7 Again, these two aspects of life, inner emotions and bodily senses, were not necessarily separated in ancient societies, but I rely on the use of this dichotomy for the convenience of contemporary readers.
- 8 Knots tied in strings were mentioned in ritual texts as ways to impede the progress of demons into the body – to literally block their paths (Böck 2003, 12–14).
- 9 References are too numerous to cite, but work of Firth (2013), Michel (2001), and Veenhof (1972) are relevant.
- 10 The composition of the audience of the Neo-Assyrian wall reliefs has received much scholarly attention. The consensus is that the audience was multi-faceted, comprised of servants and elite palace officials, as well as foreign diplomats and visitors. Arguably the most important element in the audience were those elite officials and palatial occupants who could control the king through their knowledge of omens, and other information.

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Chapter 16

The tangible self: embodiment, agency, and the functions of adornment in Achaemenid Persia

Neville McFerrin

Abstract

This paper suggests a reformulation of the visual functions of dress and its relationship to the outward projection of identities. Using the visual and material record of Achaemenid Persia as a lens, it focuses on adornment to explore how space is defined visually, comparing the reduplicative communications between spatial mediations on the body and in architecture to consider the ways in which stone, fabric, and metal serve to reinforce and highlight boundaries, thus acting as visual and material fortifications of individual agency. This approach suggests that gender is enacted rather than encoded, and it considers the body as a space of negotiation, with meaning evolving from experience predicated on sensory perception. Rather than asking what adornments signify, attention is given to what they do, privileging the individual's sensorial relationship with the body as an essential component of identity formation and highlighting the boundaries created by dress as key elements in the outward projection of this personal experience. Focusing on the experience of boundaries, the paper argues that adornments communicate in a complex multi-sensory fashion, with touch and sight as a mutually informing reciprocal system enabling the constitution of both individual and group identities.¹

Persepolis is a zone of reduplicative possibilities. These possibilities are constructed through interplays of multi-valenced, multi-referential visual mediations, with notions of dress, of the communicative potentials of cloth, metal, and mineral, at the heart of the site's communicative endeavour. Much as the site itself serves to define Achaemenid imperial ideologies, demarcating relationships between rulers and ruled through the articulation and ornamentation of space, so too do personal adornments enable individuals to delimit the boundaries of their bodies, inviting social connection, signalling group affiliation, and serving as modes of distinction.

This contribution focuses on the negotiation of boundaries by considering similarities of function between decorated buildings and adorned bodies, considering the site of Persepolis as a lens through which to consider the ways in which its treatment of adorned bodies and constructed space invites the self-conscious confrontation of such mental and physical borders. For, in Persepolis, such questions are not a matter of *what* but of *how*. Thus, this argument is not predicated upon construction techniques, either of walls or of riding habits. Instead it asks: how do adornments interact with bodies? And how can giving attention to such interactions help to reframe our understanding of the ways in which personal agency is generated and underscored, in Persepolis and beyond?

Adornments are a locus of communicative potentials; their multivalent capacities allow communities and individuals to transmit a wide range of messages to an equally wide range of viewers, only a small number of which might comprehend the variety of messages conveyed. Even as adornments serve to generate and underscore social cohesion (Wilson 2003, 6), as tools of personal distinction, they simultaneously highlight individual differentiation. Such encapsulated dichotomies extend beyond notions of in-group signalling to encompass a wide range of potential negotiations, between individuals, between empires, and between social constructs. Such formulations are a component of an interpretive process that privileges the ability of adornments to inscribe difference. But such dichotomous systems, that take identities as an either/or formulation, can generate reductive binaries that undermine the complexities of the communicative potentials we seek to understand. This is made clear through the exploration of interpretations that view adornments particularly as a marker of gendered identities.

The visual corpus of Persepolis may seem an odd zone within which to confront questions of gendered binaries, or even of gender spectra. For as Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Margaret Cool Root have noted, women are conspicuously absent from the visual programming of the site (Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1983, 23; Root 2003, 10). The sole female representative in depictions on the site is a lioness, a gift of the Elamite delegation, carried on the reliefs of the Apadana (Root 2003, 10–11). While the paucity of visual evidence for Achaemenid women at Persepolis makes it difficult to speak at length concerning the relationship of the dress of women to its larger programme, the question at hand is not what Achaemenid Persian women wore, or even what Achaemenid Persian men wore, but rather, how what these individuals might have worn has been perceived. The question is one of bias.

Persepolis may not explicitly depict gendered dichotomies, but binary tensions have long been implicit underpinnings to the study of dress in Achaemenid Persia, encouraging interpreters to consider distinctions as oppositions, rather than as components of a mutually informing duality. Greek writers from Aeschylus to Xenophon correlate Persian dress with sumptuous materiality, a concept fraught with gendered baggage. If control, both over oneself and one's environment, is a marker of normative Greek masculinity (Ormand 2018, 1–24), then excess signals a lack of control

over the same. For Greek authors who discuss Persian dress, this triangulation is key. Thus, for the 5th century BCE Athenian playwright Aeschylus, the robes of Xerxes are associated with a term that suggests the cloth was both heavily embroidered and richly coloured (Aeschylus, *Persians*, 1.836). Elsewhere, Aeschylus decries such finery as unfitting for Greek men; when Agamemnon returns from Troy in the *Agamemnon*, he berates his wife for her attempts to set out an embroidered purple carpet for him, suggesting that such a thing would be appropriate for either a woman or a barbarian, a connection underscored by the use of paired conjunctions with Aeschylus's text (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1.918–919).

Such connections remain persistent in Greek texts generated throughout the 5th century. Herodotus suggests that members of the Persian army wore embroidered tunics, using the same term, ποικίλος, that Aeschylus utilized to describe the robes of Darius (Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.61). Xenophon focuses on the richness of Persian textiles, giving particular attention to the prevalence of purple and deep red (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 8.3.3), in another echo of the sorts of displays decried as both too womanly and too barbarian by Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*. While depictions of Persian rulers and courtiers from Persepolis and Susa suggest that these descriptions may not be wholly inaccurate, the texts that contain them were not meant to be documentary. For these authors, dress serves as a marker of difference, establishing a dichotomy between Greeks and others, undermining the Persian other in part by correlating the conspicuous display of wealth with the lack of control that Greek authors associate with problematic femininity. Such descriptions highlight the capacity of dress to communicate multiple messages simultaneously; the raiments of Xerxes are at once not appropriately Greek and not appropriately masculine. Yet, the multi-valenced communicative capacities of dress extend beyond the ability to convey such intersections. They can express outright contradictions, with the same dress article indicating transgressive excess to one viewer, and normative appropriateness to another.

Modern scholars attempt consciously to set aside such textual biases, exploring questions of gendered expression through a Persian lens (Llewellyn-Jones 2015, 212–213, 218–220). Yet, for all that such discussions enliven questions of notions of masculinity or kingship, on the topic of adornment itself dichotomous thinking has proved more persistent. This is particularly apparent for those types of adornment – especially jewellery – that are associated with modern identity articulation. Thus, the presence or absence of certain types of jewellery is still used by some to attempt to identify whether burials are male or female, a thought process that oversimplifies both the complexities of gender identities (Stratton 2016, 855–856, 867; Madreiter and Schnegg *forthcoming*) and the communicative potentials of adornment. Such simplified conflation generate ongoing ramifications, both for the interpretation of sites and for conversations centring on the uses of adornment. In the case of a burial excavated on the Acropolis mound at Susa, descriptions of jewellery found in an Achaemenid-period sarcophagus are often correlated with competing theories regarding the sex

of the entombed individual, alongside descriptions that highlight the value of the materials used and the relationships between materials and locations, situating the jewellery within a nexus that emphasizes the ability of adornments to signal social position, group affiliation, and gendered expression (de Morgan 1905, 40–41; Tallon 1992, 242–243). The implication is that adornments act as markers of categorization, a part of a zero-sum identity game (Wallace-Hadrill 2007, 375) within which adornments serve to check a series of boxes; once these boxes have been marked, the job of the marker is often presumed complete.

Thus, we are faced with another how: how can we confront gender definition – indeed, identity definition – without focusing on strict questions of distinction? The processes of negotiation and performance through which such identities are enacted are ephemeral, but adornments, which serve as communicative aids for these socially charged interactions, are not. So, to begin to move beyond questions of differentiation, it is necessary to expand our notion of what it is to be adorned by exploring the correlations between multiple types of adornment at Persepolis.

Begun around 515 BCE, following Darius the Great's conquest of Egypt, the ceremonial capital of Persepolis was a hub of bureaucratic activity, a monumental complex serving to shape and underscore Achaemenid ideologies of kingship and empire (Schmidt 1957, 110; Root 1979, 103). Situated in what is now southwestern Iran, the site is not only adorned, it is adornment (Fig. 16.1). Crowning the landscape, the crenellations of the site's buildings simultaneously reference the crown of the Great King (Fig. 16.2) and mountain peaks, inserting themselves into the liminal zone between land and sky, bridging the two.



Fig. 16.1 Aerial view of the terrace of Persepolis (courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).



Fig. 16.2 Detail of King Darius I, Bisitun Monument, Iran (courtesy of HIP/Art Resource, NY).

It is this notion of liminal conflation, of boundaries elided, that is of particular interest. Much as mountains are loci of communication, joining earth to sky, and human to divine (Root 2013, 40), adornments and walls alike help to bridge gaps, even as they delimit boundaries. The vivid lapis and gold of contemporary earrings and garment appliqués both draw the eye and signal the identity of the owner; similarly, the reliefs of Persepolis, once painted in the mode of their glazed brick counterparts at Susa, underscore the might of the ruling family and the identity of the empire (McFerrin 2017, 150, 155–156). Thus, relief and monument, individual and adornment, become conflated, translating the figures of kings and subjects alike into once-bright doubles for the adornments of depicted figures.

As one draws closer to such decorations, the lines between dress and architecture become ever more blurred. While this slippage could be tracked on multiple fronts, it is clearest when reiterated. Lions are ubiquitous throughout

Persepolis. And it is in the depiction of lions that we begin to see not differentiation, but equation between architecture and body. On the façades of structures across the Tahkt, lions and bulls engage each other in a conflict of cosmic proportions (Hartner 1965, 15–16). Reliefs from the Palace of Darius depict lions in multiple guises. In the central portion of the structure, royal heroes grapple with adult lions, while to the east, they grapple with lion cubs (Root 1979, 77). While such reliefs offer fruitful commentary on the nature of Achaemenid kingship, and on appropriate masculinity, it is the lion in isolation that offers insight into notions of adornment (Fig. 16.3). In this example, carved onto a block used as a parapet in the central terrace of the courtyard of the Palace of Darius, a male lion strides forward, tail upturned and mouth open in the midst of a vocalization. The musculature of his legs is clearly defined, while his mane falls over his shoulders and down his chest in stylized locks.

However, these large-scale beasts are not the only leonine figures to appear on the reliefs of the Palace of Darius. In the western doorway in the north wall of the main hall stands a relief of the king and his attendants (Root 1979, 77–78). On this relief is a sketch, likely meant to serve as a guideline for the application of paint, serving to suggest embroidery. The sketch delineates a figure, striding forward, tail upturned, and mouth open, with a mane falling over its head and chest, its well-muscled legs tensed (Fig. 16.4). It is yet another lion, one that is almost identical to that previously described, but rather than rising in relief from the walls of the palace, it traverses



Fig. 16.3 Detail of lion from the steps of the central terrace of the courtyard of the Palace of Darius, Persepolis (courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).



Fig. 16.4 Sketch of a design of a lion on the hem of the king's gown, western doorway of the north wall of the main hall of the Palace of Darius, Persepolis (courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).

the hem of the robe of the king. Thus, we see that walls and robes are correlated, inviting the viewer to consider the relationship between multiple types of adornment.

Such notions of the relationship between adorned buildings and adorned bodies are further underscored by another ubiquitous decorative element, the twelve-petalled rosette. Rosettes, like lions, appear on many buildings across the site, but, like lions, their association with notions of adornment is clearest on a single structure: the Apadana. With its own platform rising 2.6 m above the terrace, the Apadana dominates the visual landscape of the site. Its platform makes it the highest structure on the Tahkt, while its three columned porticoes, when taken together, cover the greatest area of any building on the terrace (Root 2007, 179). Its main hall, supported by thirty-six columns, was spacious enough to contain some ten thousand visitors (Root 2015, 17), who would have gained access to the space by means of two sets of double stairways, situated on the north and east façades of the structure. These stairways, decorated with intricate

relief sculptures depicting three registers of delegates from twenty-three areas within the Achaemenid sphere of dominion (Root 1979, 88), introduce the visitor to the space, and to the inclusive ideologies of the Achaemenids themselves.

On the staircase reliefs, rosettes form a linear border, separating registers of delegates and zones of the reliefs in a manner not unlike the lions forming a decorative border defining the edge of a king's robe, or gold appliques lining the edges of an archer's garb (McFerrin 2017, 152–154) (Fig. 16.5). Thus, once more, the line between architecture and dress is blurred, with the whole of the Apadana reliefs taking on the guise of fabric, dressing the structure much as a garment dresses an individual. Beyond mimicking the properties of dress, and depicting dress itself, the reliefs of the

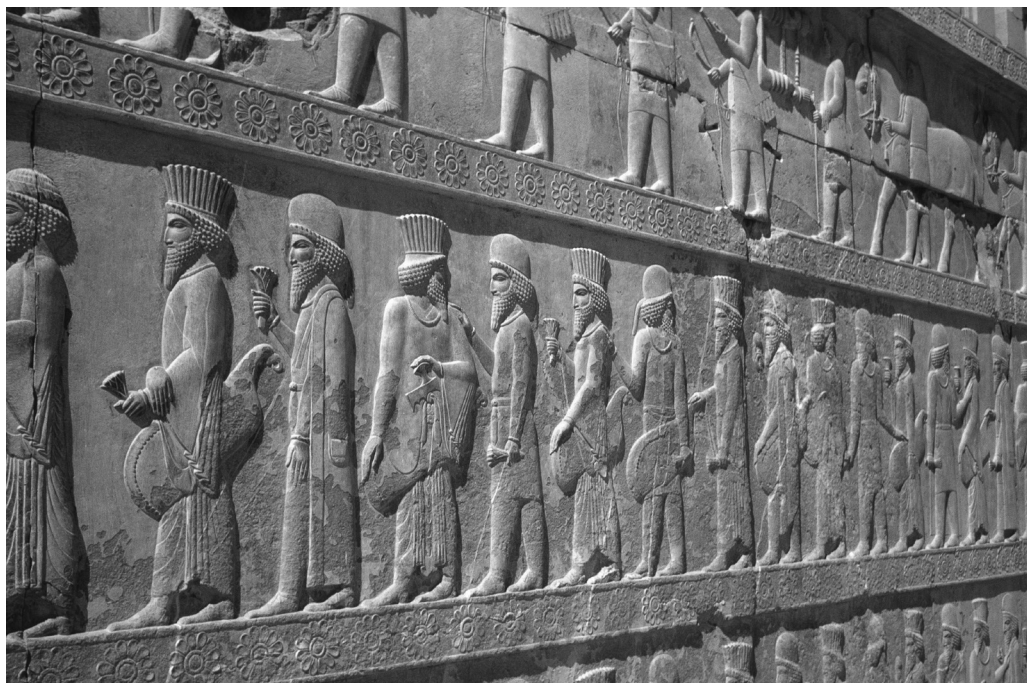


Fig. 16.5 Rosettes delineating borders on Wing B of the East Façade of the Apadana, 1973 (courtesy of Margaret Cool Root).

Apadana blur the boundaries between living and depicted. The rosettes that define the registers that separate delegations do not only reference gold appliqué in stone and glazed brick, but also allude to correlates worn by living dress practitioners (McFerrin 2017, 152–153). Similarly, the sketched lions reference not only lions in relief, but also woven lions, as suggested by extant textiles from Pazyryk (Azarpay 1959, 329). Not only might visitors to the site have recognized such details as links to dress, they might have worn them.

Even as the Apadana reliefs invite the visitor to picture him or herself as part of the visual world of the site, their position encourages the visitor to enact participation in their programme. While visitors walking up to the platform of the Apadana are confronted with the registers of delegates discussed above, as they move to the stairs themselves, they are confronted with another series of reliefs. As visitors stride up the stairs, meticulously depicted Persian elites walk alongside them, mirroring both their potential modes of dress and their physical actions, encouraging visitors to understand their relationship to these elites as one of cooperation and shared purpose (Fig. 16.6). This action may reference even further doubling. For much as the delegations depicted on the Apadana process towards the central panel depicted Darius I, living participants in the space may well have progressed along similar pathways to view the living king.



Fig. 16.6 Figures traversing the north stairway of the East wing of the inner North balustrade in the central building at Persepolis, 1973 (courtesy of Margaret Cool Root).

Thus bodies and buildings are equated, and in this equation is an assertion concerning the role of the individual in the articulation of kingship and the role of adornments more generally. Much as walls demarcate space, forming a barrier between interior and exterior, adornments demarcate the body. As Alba Cappellieri and Marco Romanelli state, “A jewel is a piece of the body of the person who wears it, forming a part of it, emphasizing it, isolating it, penetrating it, encircling it” (2004, 25). This intimate and material connection between person and thing invites interpretational slippage between the two.

An earring is both separate from and connected to the body, and as such, it visually defines the boundaries of that physical body, creating a clear division between the individual and the outside world. This division is both a challenge and a connection; even as jewellery separates individual from other, it announces that individual’s presence, drawing the eye, or the ear, to the space that one occupies. The sight of jewellery and the sound of its moving parts direct attention to the body, engaging the senses of other social actors. For while garments may reveal as much as they conceal, forming a semi-permeable lens through which to confront the body, jewellery, with its rigid materials, holds its shape, marking and elaborating upon the edges of the physical self.

Jewellery suggests a wearer. Just as walls define space by delimiting a void, jewellery intimates the presence of a body. Its often rigid forms allow it to take on its own agency. The existence of space left for the body to occupy – the void at the centre of a ring,

the loop of a necklace, the hook of an earring – invites the viewer of unworn jewellery to imagine the bodily forms that it is meant to enhance. In this capacity, pieces of jewellery can act as what Robin Bernstein terms “scriptive things”, things that have the capacity to structure social performances, even as they offer opportunities to step beyond them (2009, 69). Bernstein’s use of the word “thing”, which draws from the work of Martin Heidegger (1971, 174–182) and Bill Brown (2001, 1–22), is especially illustrative when applied to questions of the act of jewellery wearing. For in the context of thing theory, a thing has agency, forcing “a person into an awareness of the self in material relation to the thing” (Bernstein, 2009, 69–70).

Thus far, we have discussed adornments primarily as an outward projection, as part of a system within which the body becomes a sort of public art. Adornment assumes an audience. The notion of an audience induces many to view the act of adornment as a largely public phenomenon. Jewellery is indeed meant to be seen. But it is also meant to be worn. Much like other forms of public art (Clements, 2008, 19–21), the adorned body is site specific. It is through interaction with the body of the wearer that the ways in which jewellery transcends binary relationships becomes clear. For while even the shapes of jewellery presuppose interaction, these interactions need not occur only between the individual and the outside world. For the viewer, adornments fashion the body; in the hands of an astute wearer, they are formidable tools, drawing the eye where the wearer dictates. This potential to control the viewer’s gaze is a performance of power, and as such, may do much to help an individual assert his or her agency, but the value of jewellery for the wearer may have as much to do with the personal as with the public.

Jewellery can signal our physical presence to others, and it can also serve to reinforce it on a personal level, for it forms a material boundary, acting not only as a communicative tool, but also as a haptic means of differentiation between bodies and space. Such a phenomenological approach, one focusing on embodied subjectivity, draws the subject – the wearer – to the fore, highlighting a range of potential, and unstable, past experiences (Bulger and Joyce 2013, 70; Thomason 2016, 245). For while the skin forms a key boundary between whatever it is that allows an individual to think, and feel, and perceive and those things that it thinks, feels, and perceives, the relationship between our skin and open space is an amorphous one. Adornments, when worn, provide a persistent reminder of one’s body, grounding perception in the physical realm. Heavy earrings tug on the lobe of the ear and knock against the cheek, reinforcing and perhaps dictating the movement of the wearer’s head. Bracelets and necklaces press against the skin, highlighting the wearer’s action both externally, through sight and sound, and internally, through the weight and shape of the materials. Thus, in the case of extant examples of bracelets from Achaemenid Susa, the shape of the bracelet conforms to the shape of the wrist, with a slight indentation that would likely press against the delicate underside of the wrist when the arm pressed against an outside force (Plate 16.1). The value of adornments for the wearer is grounded in such substantiation.

While sight may invite the visitor to Persepolis to take part in its imperial endeavour, it is touch that enables individuals to define their realities. Even as jewellery, like walls, delimits space, separating the space of the individual from the space of another, touch offers the potential to bridge the gap. To explore these interfaces, we return once more to the Apadana reliefs. The programme of the Apadana is a nexus of mimetic potential, emphasizing communal identity, even as it insists upon individuality. In this, it participates in one of the essential components of the notion of mimesis. For mimesis is grounded in the interplay of tensions, “dancing between the very same and the very different” even as it “registers both sameness and difference, of being like, and of being Other” (Taussig 1993, 129). Thus as individual and collective, living and depicted, converge through the interrelated mediums of relief and adornment, visitors find themselves in the midst of an experiential conundrum, one that underscores the ways in which jewellery simultaneously performs roles as a public and private actor.

When engaging with an idea visually, viewers are encouraged to think of themselves as distinct from a process. It is only through physical distance, through a lack of embodiment, that we are capable of looking upon something. Thus, while a visitor to Persepolis is aware of the act of moving up a staircase, and can experience that act, visitors cannot see the act in its entirety, cannot see their bodies completing the motion, until the form is projected outward, until the body is shadowed on or reflected by the walls. Sight is dependent upon separation.

This practical consideration is made conceptual in the reliefs of the Apadana. Although the reliefs mirror action, providing access to physical space in their guise as stairway adornments, and to an imaginal zone predicated on mimetic potentials in their guise as a visual medium – the reliefs generate conceptual separations by picturing sensations that while comprehensible visibly, are not perceptible in their own right. Thus, as the lioness in the Elamite delegation opens her mouth in a roar admonishing her similarly noisemaking cubs, their roars are seen, not heard (Fig. 16.7). The ephemeral sound, which might in reality reverberate for a few seconds before fading, is given longevity in its translation from audio to visual, but this translation negates the ability to perceive the sound itself. It is precisely because we cannot hear the sound pictured that we understand the distinction – the distance – between the world of the depiction and the world of the viewer.

Similarly, theories of adornment predicated on sight and upon external signalling often focus upon mental distancing, highlighting otherness. In order to engage with the capacity of adornment to join as well as to distance, it is useful to associate adornments not with binaries, but with dualities, concepts that are mutually informing, rather than competing. Adornment does create distance, but it also creates bonds. It is possible to experience this simultaneity, but difficult to discuss it. To help bridge the gap between experience and interpretation, it is useful to move beyond a one-sense model for adornment-centred public interaction. For much as the weight of jewellery helps the individual to experience the boundaries of his or her person, the sense of touch can also enable an exploration of the boundaries of a group.



Fig. 16.7 A lioness led in tribute by the Elamite delegation on the Eastern stairway of the Apadana, Persepolis (courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).

Touch is defined by connection. On the walls of Persepolis, touch encourages visitors to engage with larger processes, not merely to observe them. In the reliefs of the Apadana, Persian ushers grasp delegates by the hand to lead them toward the depicted baldacchino where the king awaits them, reinforcing the reciprocity of the Achaemenid imperial system with reciprocity of sense experience as both delegate and usher are, in the moment of the touch, made definitively aware of simultaneous perceptions (Fig. 16.8). Reciprocity is key, on both the personal and the communal level, to the notion of an understanding of shared experience. If we see others as a “you” rather than an “it” in the parlance of Eduardo Kohn (2013, 1–2), we do so by a complex internal process in which we both formulate our perception of ourselves, and find commonalities between our internal landscape and the world we inhabit. The act of defining the boundary helps to initiate the process of eliding it.

Such notions of definition and elision as mutually informing components of an ongoing system of negotiation are useful when attempting to consider the process of identity articulation. The above discussion of adornment has been intentionally non-gendered, in part to demonstrate the ways in which perceptions of bodily experience might at least partially transcend questions of gender or sex. A bracelet serves to highlight and demarcate an arm, no matter if that arm belongs to a man or a woman. The feel of a heavy earring tugging on the lobe is not altered by the identities of the



Fig. 16.8 Tribute procession of the Syrian delegation, with a Persian courtier leading a delegate by the hand on the Eastern stairway of the Apadana, Persepolis (courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).

individual. The sense of touch again is a point of connection, while sight remains a point of division. For, it is when another gazes at an adorned body that the potential for external interpretation, and thus external censure, arises.

If dress constitutes a boundary, albeit a negotiable one, then the question becomes: which bodies need boundaries? Which identities require reinforcement? It is the notion of a need of reinforcement that perhaps caused cognitive dissonances for the Greek sources mentioned above, and for the modern minds that have internalized these culturally prevalent narratives. While Greek authors might wish to perpetuate notions that men are constructed through action, while women are fashioned through dress, the act of dressing is itself an action, and, as Agamemnon's upset over the question of appropriate colours and ornamentations suggests, it is an action that requires some skill.

Such skill is in evidence throughout the Apadana reliefs, in both the personages of the well-coiffed and well-adorned delegates and courtiers, and on the buildings themselves. As Herodotus and Xenophon both observed, notions of appropriate Achaemenid dress were as grounded in questions of cloth as of metal. For, as Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones notes, Achaemenid kings were defined more by their dress than

by their physique (2015, 235). This shift from earlier Near Eastern norms, such as that depicted on the stele of Naram-Sin, wherein the ruler's well-muscled body is prominently on display (Winter 1996, 12–14), mirrors Achaemenid ideologies more broadly. For, while many aspects of a beautiful body are largely imbued upon an individual, the process of dressing is one of personal construction, a transformative act that is open to a broader range of individuals.

The accessibility of this mode of inclusion is made visible, and perhaps tangible, throughout the Apadana reliefs, where the process of collective creation is referenced through acts of transformation, through the depiction of component materials and finished products, with the process of creation itself left ambiguous, and therefore open to manipulation in the mind of the visitor. In this way, much as jewellery is a scriptive thing, so too are the Apadana reliefs. For the reliefs, and the stairways they adorn, structure “a performance while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable” (Bernstein 2009, 69–70).

On the east wing of the Apadana, a member of the Assyrian delegation leads a ram, his hands buried in the wool of the animal, drawing attention to its texture, while alongside him, another delegate carries a bolt of folded cloth, its material marked by the presence of carefully articulated tasselled corners (Fig. 16.9). Given the proximity of fabric to ram, and the care with which the relief draws attention to – not the body of the ram, as a potential source of food, but its wool – it is then perhaps permissible to do as the reliefs ask, and to think about wool, and about wool products, arriving at a texture that the viewer can likely access, and quite readily. For, even as the delegate carries wool to the audience chamber, so too does the visitor – on the body.

This fabric is, unlike stone, a mutable boundary – one which may have been used to good effect to section off portions of the columnar hall – a boundary by which the body is both highlighted and hidden. Thus, the body is conceptualized as a bounded space, one that can be articulated and rearticulated with the addition and removal of cloth, metal, and stone, much as the Tahkt as a whole was constituted from these materials. Multiple delegates carry materials that could be associated with textiles and adornment; some carry the textiles themselves, others bring bracelets, some, like the Elamites, offer animals that occur as adornments. Even as the relief as a whole may constitute a form of adornment, with its crenellations recalling those of crowns, and its careful borders and stacked registers referencing fabric, its component parts, the depicted figures, recall the process of creating the whole.

And it is a whole that might be worn by many members of the Achaemenid imperial zone. This, too, is underscored by notions of dress, both upon and beyond the visual zone of the site. For, much as the relationship between ruler and subject is one that both insists upon and continually negotiates power imbalances, so too is gender, amongst other things “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 1986, 1067). Given the notions of collaborative creation highlighted throughout the reliefs, it is perhaps unsurprising that the sole female representative on the

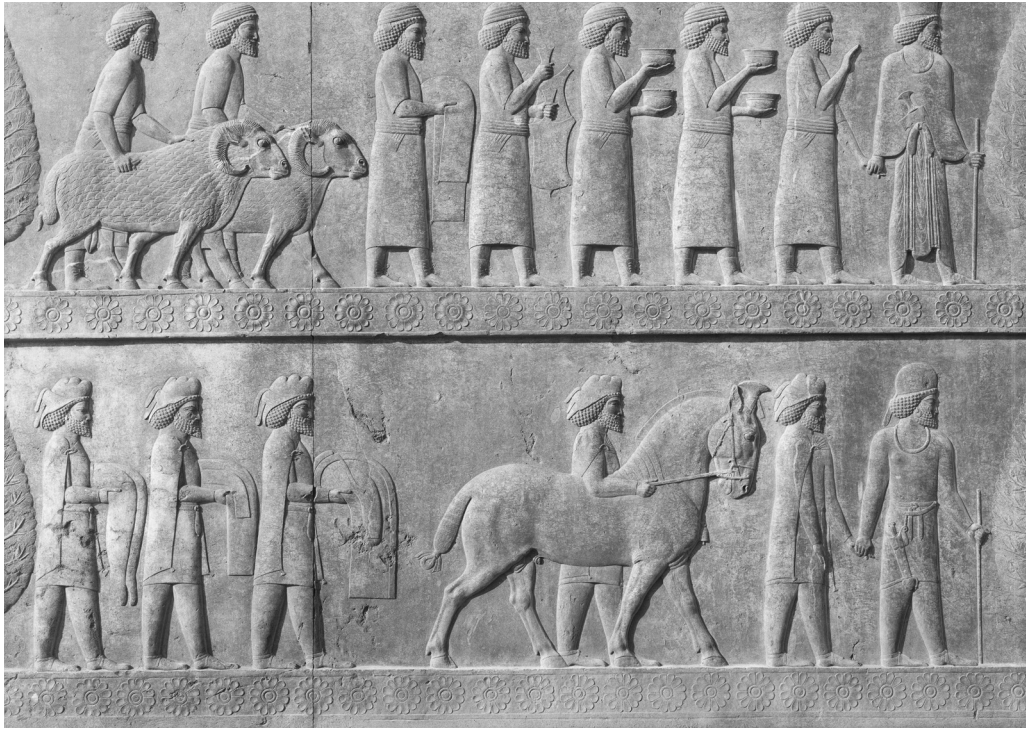


Fig. 16.9 Tribute procession of the Assyrian delegation, with delegates leading rams and carrying textiles on the Eastern stairway of the Apadana, Persepolis (courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago).

Apadana, the lioness carried by the Elamite delegation, is carefully presented as a peer to her male counterparts (Fig. 16.7). Like the adult male lions that grapple with heroes, her muscular form is clearly defined and her scale similarly imposing. Like her male counterparts, her mouth is open in a snarl, highlighting her teeth, and her destructive capacity. These lions, like the ornaments that help to constitute their human counterparts, are a duality, rather than a binary – a pair of equal power.

Thus, king and subject, man and woman, all define their bodily boundaries through the use of adornments. The monuments of Persepolis suggest that such adornments are components of an on-going process of creation and transformation, one in which individuals are simultaneously viewer and viewed, touching and touched, in a system of reciprocal action that reinforces similarities through the generation and subsequent negotiation of boundaries. Much as the adornments and fabrics carried by the delegations of the Apadana reliefs constitute the king, reinforcing the inclusive ideologies of the Achaemenid imperial venture, so too does the construction of equivalent boundaries, projected through the use of adornment, underscore similarities, rather than differences.

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